A MOMENT OF MADNESS

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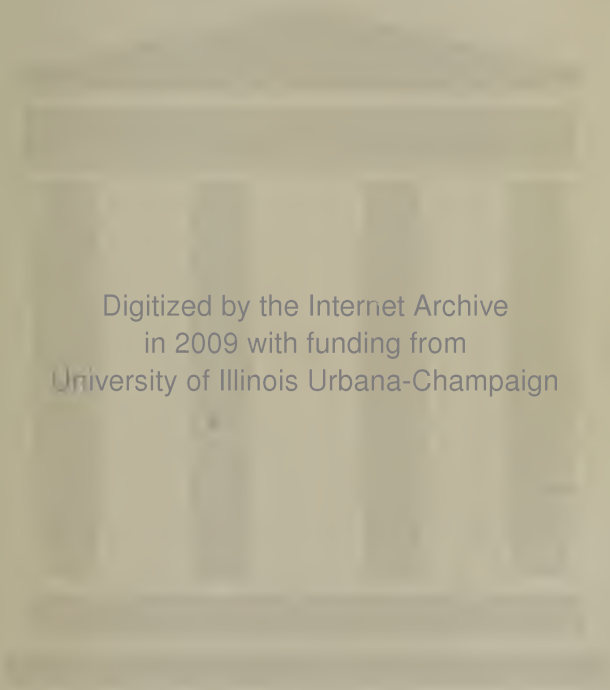
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A MOMENT OF MADNESS.

A MOMENT OF MADNESS,

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,
AUTHOR OF 'LOVE'S CONFLICT,' 'FACING THE FOOTLIGHTS,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

In offering a re-issue of these Stories to the public, I desire to express my sincere thanks to the Proprietors of 'Temple Bar,' 'Belgravia,' 'The East Anglian Holiday Annual,' 'Judy's Annual,' 'Diprose's Annual,' 'The Editor's Box,' and 'The Bolton Evening News,' for their kindness in giving me permission to reprint them.

FLORENCE MARRYAT LEAN.

20 Regent's Park Terrace, N.W.,
May 1883.

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A MOMENT OF MADNESS.

CHAPTER I.

FORTHILL TERRACE, CAMDEN TOWN.

IT is the middle of July, but the London season has not, as yet, shown any symptoms of being on the wane, and the drawing-room of the Honourable Mrs Carnaby-Hicks is arranged for the reception of visitors. Curtains of guipure lace, looped with pale-blue ribbons, shroud every window, purple irises and yellow jonquils as displayed in art needlework, adorn each chair and sofa; fanciful little tables of silk and velvet, laden with Sevres and

Dresden china are placed in everybody's way, and a powerful odour of hot-house flowers pervades the apartment. A double knock sounds at the door, and the Honourable Mrs Carnaby-Hicks starts from the dose into which she has fallen, and seizing a novel, sits upright, and pretends that she is deep in its contents. But she need not have been so punctilious, for the footman, throwing open the door, announces her brother, Mr Tresham. Roland enters the room, looking fagged, dusty, and out of sorts, a complete contrast to the dainty adornments of his sister's drawing-room.

'Well, Roland!' exclaims Mrs Carnaby-Hicks, 'and what is your news? It is an age since we have seen you! I was beginning to think you must have made away with yourself.'

'No such luck,' replies her brother, moodily, 'though I believe it would be the best thing that I could do.'

He is a handsome man of only thirty years of age, but the look of care upon his brow makes him appear older. His dress is not exactly shabby, but it is the dress of a needy gentleman, and did not

issue from the tailor's hands this season, nor even last.

'How are you all at home?' continues the lady.

'Just the same as usual; a medley of dirt, ill-management, and unpunctuality! I dread to enter the house.'

'Ah! Roland, it is too late to advise you now, but that marriage was the worst day's work you ever did. Not thirty till September, and with a wife and six children on your hands. It is a terrible misfortune!'

'And two hundred a-year on which to support them,' laughs Mr Tresham, bitterly. 'Don't speak of it, Valeria, unless you wish to drive me mad. And to add to my troubles I have just received this letter;' tossing it over to her.

'Who is it from?'

'Lady Tresham! Her generosity seems to be on a par with his! You see how she writes me word that Sir Ralph is in Switzerland mountain-climbing with Handley Harcourt, but that if he were at home she fears he would be unlikely to comply with my request.'

'Did you ask Ralph for money then?'

'Not as a gift. I wrote to him for a loan of fifty pounds, to carry on the war, but of course I should regard it as a debt. The fact is, Valeria, I don't know where to look for money; my profession brings me in nothing, and we cannot live on the miserable pittance my father left me. It is simply impossible!'

If Roland Tresham has entertained any hope that, on hearing of his difficulty, his rich sister will offer to lend or give him the money, which would be a trifle out of her pocket, he has reckoned without his host. She likes Roland in her way, and is always pleased to see him in her house, but the woman and the children may starve for aught she will do to help them. She considers them only in the light of a burthen and disgrace.

'I don't see why you shouldn't live on two hundred a-year,' she answers shortly. 'Of course it is very little, but if your wife were worth her salt she would make you comfortable on it. But that is what comes of marrying a beauty. They're seldom good for anything else.'

'There's not much beauty left about Juliet now,' replies Roland Tresham, 'but I don't think it is entirely her fault. The children worry her so, she has no energy left to do anything.'

'It's a miserable plight to be in,' sighs the Honourable Mrs Carnaby-Hicks, 'and I can see how it tells upon your health and spirits. What do you propose to do?'

'*Do!* I should like to hang myself. Do you think there is any chance, Valeria, of your husband getting me a foreign appointment? I don't care where it is. I would go out to the Fiji Islands, or Timbuctoo, or to the devil himself, to get away from it all.'

'And leave them at home?' says Mrs Carnaby-Hicks.

'Yes! Juliet should have the two hundred, and I would keep myself. Perhaps if she had only the children to look after, she might get on better. And the happiest thing for me would be, never to return!'

'I will ask Mr Carnaby-Hicks about it,' replies his sister. 'If it is to be done at all, it must be before Parliament is prorogued. But I wouldn't lose all hope with

regard to Ralph on account of Lady Tresham's letter. When he returns he can hardly refuse to lend you such a trifling sum as fifty pounds.'

It does not seem to occur to her that she would miss the money as little as Sir Ralph himself.

'I shall not ask him a second time,' says Roland, 'nor Lady Tresham either. They may keep their money to themselves. But how a father can justify to himself the fact of leaving ten thousand a-year to one son, and two hundred to the other, beats me altogether!'

'The money must go with the baronetcy,' remarks his sister coolly, 'and your portion was only intended to supplement your professional income. You ought to have made a competency by this time, Roland. You would have done so, had you not hampered yourself in such a reckless manner!'

At this moment the conversation is interrupted by the entrance of a young lady, dressed in the height of the reigning fashion.

'My husband's niece, Miss Mabel Moore,' says Mrs Carnaby-Hicks, and

then extending a hand to the girl, she draws her forward. 'Mabel, dear, this is my younger brother, of whom you have heard me speak. Ring the bell and let us have tea. Roland and I have had a long conversation, and I feel quite fatigued.'

Roland Tresham stares at his new acquaintance with unmitigated surprise. Miss Moore is a tall, dark girl with a commanding figure, clad in a pale, cream-coloured dress that fits it like a skin. Her rounded arms, her well-developed bust and shapely waist are as distinctly displayed as if the material had been strained across them; and the uninitiated Roland gazes at her in astonishment.

'Such a sweet girl,' whispers Mrs Carnaby-Hicks to him, as Mabel quits her side; 'I love her as if she were my daughter. As soon as the season is over, Mr Carnaby-Hicks and I are going to take her for a tour in Italy. And, by the way, Roland, could you not manage to accompany us? A second gentleman would be a great acquisition on the journey, and you would be invaluable to Mabel and me as a *cicerone*. Do come!'

'You might as well talk of my going to the moon, Valeria. I should enjoy it above all things, but it is impossible. Only fancy the delight though of change of scene and air and freedom from all the horrors of Camden Town. It would be like a taste of Heaven to me!'

'I am sure you could manage it if you tried! Come here, Mabel, and persuade my brother to join us in our trip to Italy.'

'Oh! Mr Tresham, *do* come,' says Mabel, throwing a glance at him from a pair of dark, languishing eyes. 'It will double Aunt Valeria's pleasure to have your company.'

Roland Tresham has not, as a rule, admired dark eyes in women nor commanding figures. His wife is very fair, and slight and fragile in appearance, and when he married her eight years before, he thought her the loveliest creature God ever made. But as Mabel Moore casts her black-lashed eyes upon him, he feels a very strong desire to join the travelling party to Italy.

'You hold out powerful temptations to

me, Miss Moore,' he answers, 'but it is too important a matter to be settled in a day. But if I *can* go, you may be sure I will.'

And then he falls to wondering whether Mrs Carnaby-Hicks intends her offer to be taken as an invitation, and means to defray his expenses. For she must know he has no money to pay them himself. Meanwhile Miss Moore pours out his tea, and hands it to him in a porcelain cup with the most gracious and encouraging of smiles. It is a strange contrast to the man who knows what he will encounter on reaching home, to be seated among all the refinement of his sister's drawing-room, sipping the most fragrant Pekoe from a costly piece of china, whilst he is waited on by a handsome woman clad in a cream-coloured skin, every fold of the train of which shakes out the essence of a subtle perfume. He revels in it whilst it lasts, though after a while he rises with a sudden sigh of recollection, and says he must be going home.

'Don't forget to ask Hicks about the appointment,' he whispers to his sister as

he takes his leave. 'Remember, I will take anything and go anywhere just to get away from this.'

'Very good,' she answers, 'and don't *you* forget that we expect you to be one of our party to Italy.'

'Yes! indeed,' echoes Mabel with a parting glance, 'I shall not enjoy my trip at all now, unless Mr Tresham goes with us!'

'What a good-looking fellow!' she exclaims as soon as the door has closed behind him. 'Aunty! why did you never tell me what he was like?'

'My dear child, where was the use of talking of him? The unfortunate man is married, and has no money. Had he been rich and a bachelor, it would have been a different thing!'

'I don't know that,' says Miss Mabel, 'for my part I prefer married men to flirt with; they're so safe. Besides, it's such fun making the wives jealous.'

'It would take a great deal to make Mrs Tresham jealous,' says the elder lady. 'They're past all that, my dear. So you can flirt with Roland to your heart's con-

tent, only don't go too far. Remember Lord Ernest Freemantle!'

'Bother Lord Ernest,' returns the fashionable young lady in precisely the same tone as she would have used the stronger word had she been of the stronger sex.

Meanwhile the gentleman is going home by train to Camden Town: a locality which he has chosen, not on account of its convenience, but because he can rent a house there for the modest sum of thirty pounds a-year. His immediate neighbours are bankers' clerks, milliners, and petty tradesmen from the West End, but the brother of Sir Ralph Tresham of Tresham Court, and the Honourable Mrs Carnaby-Hicks, of 120 Blue Street, Mayfair, has no alternative but to reside amongst them. He has chosen a profession in which he has signally failed, and has hampered himself with a wife and six children, when his private means are not sufficient to support himself. He fancies he can hear his children shouting even before he has gained the little terrace in which they reside. They are all so abominably strong and healthy: their voices will reach to any

distance. And as he comes in sight of the familiar spot, his suspicions turn to certainties. Wilfrid and Bertie and Fred, three sturdy rascals with faces surrounded by aureoles of golden hair like angels' crowns, but plastered with dirt like the very lowest of human creatures, are hanging on to the palings which enclose a patch of chickweed and dandelions in front of the house, and shouting offensive epithets to every passer-by.

'Can't you keep inside and behave yourselves? How often have I ordered you not to hang about the garden in this way?' exclaims Roland Tresham, as he cuffs the little urchins right and left. The two youngest rush for protection to their mother, howling, whilst the eldest sobs out,—

'Mamma said we might play here.'

'Then your mother's as great a fool as you are,' replies the father, angrily, as he strides into the house.

Juliet Tresham is waiting to receive him, with a deep frown upon her brow. Any unprejudiced observer would see at a glance that she is a lovely woman, but it is the loveliness of beauty unadorned. Her luxu-

riant golden hair is all pushed off her face, and strained into a tight knot at the back of her head. Her large blue eyes are dull and languid; her lips are colourless, and her ill-fitting, home-made dress hangs awkwardly upon her figure. In her husband's eyes, all her beauty and her grace have faded long ago. He associates her with nothing now, but weak lungs and spirits, squalling children, badly-cooked dinners, and an untidy home. It is scarcely to be wondered at that she does not smile him a welcome home.

'You might inquire whether the children are in the right or wrong, before you hit them,' she says sharply. 'I told them they might play in the front garden.'

'Then they must suffer for your folly, for I won't have them hanging about the place like a set of beggars' brats.'

'It's all very fine for you to talk, but what am I to do with them cooped up in the house, on a day like this? If you had the charge of them, you'd turn them out anywhere, just to get rid of them.'

'Why don't you let the girl look after them?'

'*The girl!*' That's just how you men talk! As if one wretched girl of fourteen had not enough to do to keep the house clean, and cook the dinner, without taking charge of half-a-dozen children!'

'Oh! well, don't bother me about it. Am I to have any dinner to-day or not?'

'I suppose Ann will bring it up when it is ready,' says his wife indifferently; 'you can't expect to be waited on as if you were the owner of Tresham Court.'

'D—n you! I wish you'd hold your tongue!' he answers angrily.

He calls it his dinner, for the good reason that it is the only dinner he ever gets, but it is a wretched mockery of the meal.

'What do you call this?' he says, as he examines the untempting-looking viands, and views with disgust the evident traces of black fingers on the edge of the dish. 'Take it away, and serve it me on a clean plate. I may be obliged to swallow any dog's meat you chose to put before me, but I'll be hanged if I'll eat the smuts off your servant's hands as well.'

Mrs Tresham, who is occupied at the

other end of the table in cutting slices of bread and salt butter for the tribe of little cormorants by which she is surrounded, just turns her head and calls through the open door to the maid-of-all-work in the kitchen.

'Ann, come and fetch away this dish; your master says it is dirty.'

'Do it yourself!' roars her exasperated husband. 'It is quite bad enough that you are so lazy, you won't look after any of my comforts in my absence, without your refusing to set matters right now.'

His wife takes up the dish in silence, and leaves the apartment, whereupon two of the children, disappointed of their bread and butter, begin to cry. Roland Tresham, after threatening to turn them out of the room if they do not hold their tongues, leaves his seat and leans out of the open window, disconsolately. What a position it is in which to find his father's son! Outside, his neighbours are sitting in their shirt sleeves, smoking clay pipes in their strips of garden, or hanging over the railings talking with one another; in the road itinerant merchants are vending radishes,

onions, and shellfish ; whilst a strong, warm smell is wafted right under his nostrils from the pork-pie shop round the corner. Inside, the children are whimpering for the return of their mother round a soiled table-cloth which bears a piece of salt butter, warm and melting, a jar of treacle with a knife stuck in it, a stale loaf, a metal tea-pot, and knives and forks which have been but half-cleaned. A vision comes over Roland of that art-decorated drawing-room in Blue Street, with the porcelain tea-service, the silken clad figure, and the subtle perfume that pervaded the scene ; and a great longing for all the delicacies and refinements of life comes over him, with a proportionate disgust for his surroundings. When his wife returns with the beefsteak, he pushes it from him. His appetite has vanished with the delay.

'I can't eat it,' he says impatiently. 'Take the filth away.'

'Well, it's the best I can do for you,' is her reply. 'It's quite enough for a woman to be nurse and housemaid, without turning cook into the bargain.'

'It is a long time since I have expected

you to do anything to please me, Juliet; however, stop the mouths of those brats of yours, and send them to bed. I want the room to myself. I have work which must be done this evening.'

She supplies the children's wants, and hurries them from the room, whilst her husband sits sulking and dreaming of Blue Street. If his brother-in-law can only get him a foreign appointment, how gladly he will fly from this squalid home for ever. He pictures a life by the shores of the Mediterranean, in the forests of Brazil, on the plains of India, or the Australian colonies, and each and every one seems a paradise compared with that which he leads at present.

Mrs Tresham, putting her little ones to rest, feels also that, except for them, she would lay down her existence. She is utterly sick and wearied of her life. She is almost cross with Wilfrid and Bertie and Fred, because they will bolster one another, instead of lying down in their cots and going to sleep like pattern boys. For Baby Roland is whimpering for the breast, and two-year-old May is fractious with the

pain of cutting her double teeth. Lily, her mother's help and companion, is the only one that waits patiently until her turn arrives to be undressed. But when the rest are at last subdued, or satisfied, and Juliet Tresham turns to attend to her eldest daughter, her trembling fingers have busied themselves but for a few seconds with strings and buttons, before her arms are cast around the child, and she bursts into a storm of tears.

'Mamma, why do you cry?' asks Lily anxiously.

'Oh, Lily, Lily! It is not my fault—it is not my fault.'

God help her, poor Juliet, it is not! Almost a girl in years, yet laden with cares such as few wives in her position are ever called upon to bear, she has sunk beneath the weight of an overwhelming load. Health and energy have failed her, and her husband's patience has not proved equal to the occasion, and so irritability and discontent have crept in on the one hand, and disgust and indifference on the other. And yet they loved each other once, oh! so dearly, and believed from

their hearts they would have died sooner than give up their mutual affection.

But Mrs Tresham does not cry long. She persuades herself that the man downstairs is not worth crying for.

'Get into bed, Lily, darling, or papa will be coming up to see what we are about.'

'I didn't kiss papa nor wish him goodnight,' says the child.

'No, no! it doesn't signify. He doesn't care for your kisses, nor for mine.'

She tucks her little girl into her bed and descends to the sitting-room again, feeling injured and hard of heart. Roland, as she enters, glances at her with a look of disgust.

'Your hair is half way down your back.'

She laughs slightly, and, pulling out the fastenings of her hair, lets the rippling mass fall over her shoulders. Roland used to admire it so much in the days gone by, and say it was the only gold he cared to possess. Has she any hope that he will recall his former feelings at the sight of her loosely falling locks? If so, she is mistaken, for he only remarks coldly,—

'I must beg you not to turn my room into a dressing-room. Go and put your hair up tidily. I hate to find it amongst my papers.'

'I believe you hate everything except your own comfort,' she replies. 'You're the most selfish man I ever came across.'

'Perhaps so! But as long as this house belongs to me, you'll be good enough to keep your opinions to yourself. If I can't have comfort when I come home, I will at least have peace.'

'And much peace *I* get, day or night.'

'It is by your own mismanagement if you do not.'

'How do you make that out? Has your want of money anything to do with my mismanagement? Have the children anything to do with it? You ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

'Ought I?' he returns, biting his lip. 'Then, perhaps, you'll be glad to hear that I have applied for a foreign appointment that will take me out to India, or the Brazils, for the remainder of my life.'

'Oh, Roland!' she cries, catching her breath; 'but not to leave us?'

'Certainly to leave you. That was the sole object of my application. Aren't you delighted to hear it? We lead a cat-and-dog life as things are at present, and the sooner we are separated the better.'

'But the children—and *me!*' she gasps, with a face of chalky whiteness.

'Oh, don't be afraid! you will be provided for.'

'But if you should be ill?' suggests the woman fearfully.

'Then I shall die, perhaps, and so much the better. You have not made my life such a heaven to me that I shall lose much by its resignation.'

Then she falls upon his neck, weeping.

'Oh, Roland, Roland! do not speak to me like that.'

But he pushes her from him. He has had no dinner, and that is a trial that never improves the masculine temper.

'Don't make a fool of yourself!' he says roughly.

Juliet raises her head and dries her eyes. She is a proud woman and a high-spirited one, and never disposed to take a rebuff meekly.

'I *am* a fool,' she answers. 'Any woman would be a fool who wasted a regret upon such an icicle as you are. I hope to Heaven you may get your appointment and go out to the Brazils, and never come back again; for the less I see and hear of you the better.'

'Just what I said,' remarks her husband indifferently. 'You are as sick of me as I am of you, and it's of no use disguising the truth from one another.'

'There *was* a time when you thought nothing too good to say of me,' she cries, hysterically.

'Was there? Well, you can't expect such things to last for ever, and you have really made my life such a hell to me of late that you can't be surprised if I look forward to any change as a blessing.'

'Oh! It has come to that, has it—that you want to get rid of me? Why don't you put the finishing stroke to your cruelty and say at once that you hate me?'

'I am afraid you are making me do something very much like it.'

'The truth is, you are tired of me,

Roland! It is nursing your children and trying out of our scanty income to provide for your wants that has brought me down to what I am, and since I have ceased to please your eyes, I have wearied out your fancy.'

'Yes! my dear,' he says, with provoking nonchalance. 'You are quite right; I *am* very tired of you, and particularly at this moment. Suppose you leave me to my writing, and go to bed.'

Mrs Tresham rushes from the little room and slams the door behind her. But she does not go to bed. She takes a seat amongst her sleeping children, and, resting her head upon her hands, weeps for the past which is slumbering like them, although she thinks it dead. It is just nine o'clock, and as the hour strikes from a neighbouring church tower, she sees the postman coming up the street. He enters the *parterre* of chickweed and dandelions, and gives a double knock at the front door, whilst Mrs Tresham, sitting at her bedroom window, wonders vaguely who the letter can be from. But presently she hears a shout from below — a mingled

shout of surprise and horror and excitement, and startled and curious she runs downstairs to learn the cause.

Her husband's handsome face—flushed and animated—turns towards her as she opens the door.

'What is the matter?' she exclaims hurriedly.

'*What is the matter?*' he repeats. 'What is *not* the matter? My God! can it possibly be true?'

He has leapt from his seat and passed his fingers through his hair, which is all on end. His eyes flame like living fire; his whole frame is trembling; she thinks for the moment that he has gone mad.

'Roland, you are frightening me terribly! Have you had bad news?'

'Bad news! No. Glorious news! At least I suppose I ought not to call it so, because he's my brother, but he has never been like a brother to me. Juliet! Only fancy—Ralph is dead, killed by a fall down the mountain side.'

'Oh! Poor Sir Ralph! How terrible! But perhaps it is not true.'

'It *is* true. This letter is from Lady

Tresham's nephew, Handley Harcourt, who was with Ralph at the time of his death. And they are bringing the body to England. And—and—can't you understand? *I* am Sir Roland Tresham, of Tresham Court—with ten thousand a-year to keep it up on, and— Oh, my God!—my God! I believe the news will drive me mad.'

He casts himself face downwards on the rickety couch in the corner of the room, and sobs as if, without that relief, his heart would burst with joy. Meanwhile his wife stands motionless, almost unable to comprehend the sudden change in their condition, until her husband starts up again, exclaiming,—

'What a child I am. But it only proves what I have suffered. To be free, once and for ever, of all this struggling and starvation—to see my poor children placed in the position to which they were born—It is too great a change to be believed in, all at once. My boys shall enter the army and navy—and my girls have every advantage my wealth can procure them. Oh, it is too much! It has all happened

so suddenly. I feel as if I should die before I come into it. Sir Roland Tresham, of Tresham Court! Sir Roland Tresham, of Tresham Court! Merciful heavens, am I awake or in a dream?'

He has never mentioned his wife whilst enumerating the advantages his new fortune will bring him. He has never once congratulated himself on the fact that *she* will no longer be obliged to slave and work and deny herself as she has been used to do. All he thinks of are the children and himself.

'When will you come into all this, Roland?' she asks.

'I am it now! I was the Baronet from the moment of my poor brother's death.'

'And shall we go to Tresham Court soon?'

'Directly the funeral is over. I shall see the lawyers and Valeria the first thing in the morning, and know all about it. But I would rather you went upstairs and left me alone. I must have time to become accustomed to the idea of this wonderful transformation scene. By to-morrow morning I shall be all right.

Good-night! Good-night! There will be no more trouble about money now. And Sir Wilfrid shall be at Eton before he knows what he is about. By Jove! How marvellously things do come round.'

He nods her a careless farewell in an excited sort of manner, and the new Lady Tresham creeps up to her bed and takes baby Roland in her arms, and sobs herself to sleep with his chubby face pressed close against her bosom.

CHAPTER II.

TRESHAM COURT, GLAMORGANSHIRE.

'NOW you will be able to take that trip to Italy with us,' says the Honourable Mrs Carnaby-Hicks a few days later, as Sir Roland and she sit in the artistic drawing-room in Blue Street together. The funeral of the late baronet is over—and the new one is installed in his stead. Lady Tresham and the children are already at the Court, and Sir Roland has come up to town to see his sister. 'You can come to Italy with us,' repeats Mrs Carnaby-Hicks. 'You are sadly in need of rest and change, and it will do you all the good in the world. You will find our dear Mabel a most

charming companion, and I am sure you have earned the right to take a holiday!'

'I should enjoy it above all things,' replies Sir Roland, as he glances at Miss Moore. 'But do you think it would be advisable. Shall I not be expected to take up my residence at Tresham Court, at all events for a while?'

'Not a bit of it! I hope you are not going to make yourself a slave to your position. Besides, from what you tell me, I should imagine it will be all the better for Lady Tresham to get a little accustomed to housekeeping before you rejoin her. She must need practice.'

Sir Roland lifts his hands deprecatingly.

'Heaven help my guests if she doesn't improve! But there seems to be an excellent staff of servants down there, and the majority will remain with us. And it would be so delightful to get away from it all. I thirst to leave the remembrance of the past entirely behind me—when do you start, Valeria?'

'The day after to-morrow!'

'That is sharp work. I shall hardly have time to do my business here and run

down to Tresham Court and back again in a couple of days.'

'Why go down to the Court? There will only be a scene if you do. Write and tell Lady Tresham of your intention.'

'Oh, Sir Roland, I shall *never* forgive you if you cry off now,' interposes Mabel. 'You know it was a bargain that you should go with us if you could. And aunty means to take Venice on our way. Fancy Venice and gondolas in this heavenly weather! It will be *too* delicious.'

Gondolas and Mabel Moore win the day, and Sir Roland agrees to write to his wife instead of going down to Tresham Court.

'Now, you are quite, *quite* sure you are not telling us a story,' says Miss Moore, with a winning smile, 'because I know if you go home that Lady Tresham will not let you return to us again. You *promise* only to write, don't you?'

'I *promise!*' repeats Sir Roland, with an uneasy twinge of conscience nevertheless. But he keeps his word, and a letter by the next day's post informs Juliet that

her husband is going to visit Italy with his sister, and that she must manage matters at Tresham Court as best she can until his return. This intelligence falls upon the wife like a sudden blow. She feels very strange and awkward as the mistress of this great rambling house, with its retinue of servants, but she has been seizing the opportunity of Sir Roland's absence to try and become acquainted with the *ménage* of the kitchen and the housekeeper's room, that she may astonish him with her aptitude on his return. And now he is going to leave her to fight with all her new responsibilities alone, whilst he is enjoying a trip upon the Continent. Well, she will not be so mean spirited a creature as to sit down and weep for his absence. She will show him that she can enjoy life as well as himself when she has the means to do so. Yet the tears chase themselves rapidly down her cheeks as she thinks thus to herself, for Lady Tresham has two nurses now to look after her children, and can afford to indulge her feelings without spectators. It is a bright sunny morn-

ing in the first week of August; the grounds of Tresham Court are filled with beautiful flowers and leafy trees and singing birds, and the pale-faced, weary woman takes her husband's letter in her hand, and seats herself beneath the shade of a cedar tree on the smooth green lawn, and indulges her sorrowful thoughts to their fullest extent.

Presently she hears a soft voice calling her by name. She looks up in surprise; beside her stands an elderly lady, dressed in widow's weeds.

'Your servants said you were not at home, Lady Tresham, but I caught a glimpse of your dress through the trees, and hoped you would not deem it a liberty if I introduced myself to you as the widow of your husband's brother.'

'Lady Tresham!' cries Juliet, springing to her feet. 'I am glad to see you, but I am very untidy; I did not expect any one to call to-day. I did not even know that you were in the county.'

'I have a house of my own about five miles from here, but I only returned to it yesterday. And so you are really Sir

Roland's wife. Why, you are a mere girl.'

'Indeed, you are mistaken. It is a long time since I was a girl. I am twenty-six!'

'And I am twenty years older than yourself, so you see I have a right to consider you a girl. But you have been crying. Surely you have no trouble now. I thought all your troubles lay in the want of means.'

'We *were* very, very poor,' says Juliet, with proud simplicity, 'and I am hardly accustomed to the use of money yet. But I was crying—it is very foolish of me, I know, but I cannot help it—because my husband is going away.'

'Going away! and where?'

'To Italy, with his sister, Mrs Carnaby-Hicks. He has been very worried and upset lately, Lady Tresham, and he wants change, and I know it will be best for him —but—but—'

'You feel the responsibility of being left alone; that is very natural. Yet, perhaps, it will teach you self-dependence. And for my own part, I am glad Sir Roland is away just now. I want to make friends

with you, my dear; to help you, if it is in my power. I know your husband has thought hard things of me, and, perhaps, of poor Sir Ralph into the bargain; but in what we did we believed we were acting for the best. Now, all that is over; you will neither of you ever want money again, but you may need advice. And I should like to begin by advising you. Why do you not take this trip with your husband? You look pale and worn out. It would do you good as well as him.'

'He does not want me,' says Juliet, sadly; 'he is only going in order to get away from me.'

'That is hardly possible. You are a wife of whom any man must be proud.'

'I used to be told I was pretty,' replies Lady Tresham, with a faint blush; 'but that was a long time ago.'

'Rubbish, child; you are in your prime. And you have six children; and I have not even one. What a happy woman you ought to be.'

But Lady Tresham does not answer. The tears are rising thickly to her eyes, and falling down her cheeks again.

'I would give them all up—yes, every one!' she cries, hysterically, 'to regain their father's love. Oh, Lady Tresham, what must you think of me for speaking like this to an utter stranger?'

'Cease to look on me as a stranger, then, dear child, and let us be friends. Cannot I do anything to help you out of this heavy trouble?'

'Nothing; nothing. It is incurable, and I must bear it as best I can. He loved me whilst I had the means to make myself look pretty; when I had a colour in my cheeks, and a gloss upon my hair. But I have lost all that, Lady Tresham. Days and nights of sickness and privation have robbed me of my beauty and his love. And then my temper grew irritable, and he sickened of his home and me; and I shall never know any happiness in this world again.'

'If you have somewhat wearied your husband's love in poverty, you must regain it in prosperity,' says Sir Ralph's widow.

'Indeed, you do not know him, Lady Tresham.'

'I do not know Sir Roland, my dear,

but I have known many men, and they are all alike. The philosophy of few of them will survive their personal discomfort. Sir Roland will find things very different on his return to England, and the old feelings will have an opportunity of revival. Come, my dear girl, you must not lose heart.'

'But I am so ignorant how to order things aright,' sighs Juliet, 'I have had so little experience.'

'I will be your teacher, if you will permit me. Tresham Court always had the credit of being well governed under my reign. And first, I would make an improvement in your dress. Such a beautiful figure was never meant to be concealed under that clumsy thing.'

'I was obliged to get my mourning ready made,' says Juliet, looking down at her ill-fitting black robe.

'True; but I must send my dressmaker to you forthwith. And now let me see the dear little ones. I love children all the more that I have never been a mother.' And so the ladies, already friends, drift away into that most interesting of feminine topics, the nursery, and great plans are

laid for the benefit of Juliet's little family before they separate again. On the same day Sir Roland is making his final preparations to join his sister's party, though not without a few self-reproaches, which he stifles by recalling the establishment at Forthill Terrace, Camden Town. It is only fair, he tells himself, that after so many years of domestic misery he should use his unexpected liberty by taking a little change. And for the first few days the change bids fair to fulfil its promise. The Carnaby-Hicks proceed South leisurely, taking the Rhine on their way, and Sir Roland can conceive of no more delicious sensation than floating down the River of Romance on those balmy August evenings by the side of Mabel Moore. That young lady does not spare him in any way. From the beginning she claims his attendance for herself, and exercises all her fascination freely upon the unfortunate man, who cannot help being attracted by the charms of her person, and the meaning glances she so liberally bestows upon him.

'What a pity that Juliet has not a more commanding appearance,' he thinks to

himself, as he watches Mabel's fine form distinctly outlined in the moonlight. 'Miss Moore has twice her importance; she looks as if she had been born to a title.' And Mabel interrupts his reverie by a heavy sigh.

'Why do you sigh, Miss Moore?'

'I was thinking how unequally this world is balanced, Sir Roland. Everything goes wrong, doesn't it?'

'I cannot quite agree with that sentiment; not, at least, whilst you and I are floating down the Rhine together.'

'But it won't last.'

'Not for ever, unfortunately' But let us enjoy it whilst it does.'

'I cannot thoroughly enjoy myself when I know my pleasure must come to an end. When I am most happy, I remember that in a few weeks it will all be over, and we shall be back in Blue Street, and you down at Tresham Court with your wife and family.'

'Don't talk of it please,' says Sir Roland with a shudder.

'*Why?*' asks Miss Moore innocently; 'don't you love little children?'

'Not particularly. Do you?'

'I don't care for most people's children, but I should for yours.'

'You are very good to say so', replies Sir Roland: but he knows they are treading on dangerous ground, and the subject had better be dropped. As he lies in his berth that night, and thinks over the events of the day, he remembers how his wife told him before their marriage that she disliked children, and he had twitted her with the fact on seeing her devotion to their firstborn. And he recalls how she had looked into his face with her large blue eyes—so clear and lovely and loving as they were in those days—and whispered, 'But this is *yours*, Roland.' There is something like a tear in Sir Roland Tresham's eye as he turns uneasily in his berth, and thinks how those happy days have faded; but it is of Juliet, and not of Mabel, he dreams as he falls asleep. The Honourable Mrs Carnaby-Hicks sees the flirtation going on between her niece and her brother, but does not concern herself in the matter. Miss Moore knows what she is about, and is perfectly able to take care of herself; indeed, Mrs Carnaby-

Hicks thinks she can already discern the instinct by which the young lady is guided. But Sir Roland, who can only interpret her words and glances by his own lights, believes himself to be on the verge of a precipice, and yet has not the moral courage to fly from a temptation that is so flattering to his vanity. Mabel's chief weapon is melancholy. She professes melancholy whenever it occurs to her, until Sir Roland is forced to demand the reason of her serious looks.

'How can you ask?' she says one evening—the first of their arrival in Venice —'when you know that auntie has asked Lord Ernest Freemantle to join our party to-morrow?'

'What difference will that make to us?'

'Why, will he not expect to be always by my side, and break in upon the pleasant *têtes-à-tête* we have had together?'

'Have they been so *very* pleasant to you then, Mabel?'

'Oh, Sir Roland, cannot you judge of my feelings by your own?'

'If I did that—' he commences fervently, but there he stops. The vision of two

blue eyes, dimmed with tears, rises before him, and he stamps the temptation down.

'Whatever I may feel,' he says to himself afterwards, 'I will not allow my tongue to turn traitor,' and so Miss Moore is disappointed of her answer.

Letters came to him frequently from his wife—long letters, in which she gives him a full account of her friendship with Sir Ralph's widow, but not a word of the way in which she is managing the household.

'I shouldn't think the presence of the dowager will do much to enliven the Court,' remarks Mrs Carnaby-Hicks spitefully.

'She is not likely to teach my wife extravagance,' laughs Sir Roland; 'but Juliet and she seem to get on very well together.'

'Perhaps she is a style that suits Lady Tresham,' says his sister. 'I have always understood she was a dowdy and a screw.'

'Oh, I don't mean to let my wife *screw*,' replies the baronet uneasily. 'She has had little enough pin-money hitherto, poor girl, and she shall have a liberal allowance now, if nothing else.'

'Why do you call Lady Tresham "poor"?' whispers Mabel in his ear. 'I should have said she was the richest of women.'

'Not quite that,' he answers, wilfully misunderstanding her, 'though she need have no fear for the future. But she has had barely enough for comfort until now.'

'She has always had *you*,' says Miss Moore, softly.

'Some ladies might consider that an extra misfortune!'

'*Some* might,' echoes the girl with a heavy sigh, the meaning of which it is impossible to misconstrue. Lord Ernest Freemantle proves to be a simple, undersized little gentleman, who is very much enamoured of Miss Mabel Moore, and becomes proportionately jealous of Sir Roland Tresham. And the latter, delighted at the feeling he has provoked, takes pleasure in exciting it to the last degree, by a still closer attendance on the young lady. One evening, when she has refused to accompany Lord Ernest and her aunt on a walking expedition through the town, Sir Roland persuades her to go on the water with him in a gondola.

Mabel assents with alacrity, and they are soon floating together over the placid surface of the canal, seated under the canopy at one end of the boat, whilst the gondoliers ply their oars to the music of their own voices at the other.

'How I wish we could go floating on like this into eternity,' remarks Sir Roland, presently.

'It would be very easy,' replies Mabel in a low voice. 'It is but to cast ourselves over the side into those dark waters and sink out of sight for ever. It would be a happier fate—at least for me—than any I have to look forward to.'

'You mustn't talk like that. You are young, and have every prospect of a happy life before you.'

'Indeed, I have not.'

'My dear Mabel, why those tears?' exclaims Sir Roland, as the girl dashes her hand across her eyes. 'What have I said to vex you?'

'Nothing. But life is so hard, and—and—disappointing.'

He passes his arm around her waist.

'Tell me what makes it so to you.'

'Oh, Roland,' she whispers, '*you know.*'

The tone, the words, are too much for him. To hold a pretty woman in his arms and hear her murmuring her love for himself would be perhaps too much for any man. Anyway, it disperses all Sir Roland's prudence.

'My *darling*,' he says emphatically, 'why cannot we end all this misery, and live for each other from this time forward?' But as he speaks, the gondoliers alter their chant, and strike up a little Neapolitan barcarolle. It is a simple plaintive air, without much merit in itself, but the last time Sir Roland heard it, it came from Juliet's lips as she was hushing a fractious child to rest. In a moment the past scene rises before him. He can see his wife's drooping figure, the sad look in her eyes; can hear the faltering tones of her weary voice. He recalls, in fact, the mother of his children, the woman who has borne, however impatiently, the burden and heat of the day with him; and all the best part of the man's nature rises up to condemn his present faithless action.

'God in heaven!' he exclaims aloud;

'what am I saying and doing? Mabel, forgive me! It was the madness of a moment. It shall never be repeated.'

But he has said the words, and they are not to be unsaid. Miss Moore enjoys the situation. It appeals to her romantic proclivities, and she clings to him tightly even whilst she murmurs.

'Oh no; you mustn't say such things to me. It is very, very wrong. But, Roland, to know you love me atones for everything. I can die happy now.'

'Indeed, I had no right to speak to you in such a manner, but your tears made me lose sight of prudence. Mabel, promise me that you will forget what I said.'

'Don't ask me that, it will be so sweet to remember,' she says, still clinging to him. He tries gently to disengage himself.

'Sit back on your seat, there's a good girl. These fellows are looking at us. Mabel, try and be calm. We must never mention this subject again. It is too painful.'

'But why should we deny ourselves the poor delights of memory, since it is all that is left?'

'We must stamp it out. It can lead to no good for either of us; and for you, perhaps, to irreparable harm. I am not a Trojan in virtue, Mabel; you must not try me too hard.'

'But you will love me always, Roland, will you not?'

What can he say? He knows already that he does not love her at all. But he is a man, and she is a woman, and he does as many other men would do—he swears he shall never cease to care for her.

'If I were free!' he murmurs; 'but you see how it is, my darling. I am bound hand and foot, and we never can be anything more than we are to one another. I must not quite forget my poor children.'

'But we shall be friends always, shall we not?'

'The very best and closest of friends, but we mustn't trust ourselves alone again. You are too lovely, Mabel, and I—I am too weak. I am sure you must see the reason of what I say?'

'Yes; yes. But let us enjoy this one last evening together. Don't go home just yet. Remember it is for the last time.'

He cannot but yield to her entreaty, but when they reach the hotel he resolves that it must never occur again. Mabel Moore is not the woman to let him off easily. She will make him remember his avowal of that evening for ever afterwards, and Sir Roland feels that his only safety lies in flight. During the self-reproachful night that follows, when the thought of his wife and children rises up to make him acknowledge that nothing in the whole world could compensate him for the loss of that which he has held so loosely, he makes a resolution to return to Tresham Court the very next morning. Poor Juliet! Now he comes to think of it, he does not believe he has given her one kiss of congratulation on her newly-acquired dignity. They were beginning to be very unhappy in the past, he knows, but it seems hard now that he should have visited the entire blame on the head of the woman who had so much the heavier portion of the load to bear. When he rises the following morning his first act is to seek the apartments of his sister, and inform her of his determination to return to England. He finds Mrs Carnaby-Hicks

radiantly triumphant, and apparently quite indifferent as to whether he remains with them or not.

'My dear Roland, you must do just as you think best, and indeed I have this moment received news that renders it very improbable that we shall be able to extend our trip to Italy this year. Lord Ernest Freemantle has proposed to our dear Mabel. Mr Carnaby-Hicks is delighted, and so am I. I have had hopes of such an occurrence for a long time (for no one could help seeing how Lord Ernest admired our dear girl), but your taking her out in the gondola alone last evening brought matters to a crisis. And indeed, were it not for the issue, I should feel almost disposed to quarrel with you, Roland, for being so careless of her reputation. It might have turned matters just the other way. You are too young and handsome to play such freaks with an unmarried girl.'

'From what you say, then, I may conclude Miss Moore has accepted Lord Ernest's offer.'

'Why, of course! What else should she do? And as he is anxious the marriage

should take place as soon as possible, I suppose we shall have to go home again.'

'Then, will you convey my warmest congratulations to the bride-elect, and tell her that I trust we shall meet again in England?'

'Won't you stop and see her yourself?'

'I think not—thanks! I see there is a midday train to Paris, which I can catch if I lose no time. So I will wish you good-bye at once, Valeria!'

'Good-bye, my dear Roland! We shall, as you say, soon meet again, and I think you are wise to return, for I am afraid all our fun is over for this season!'

The midday train takes him to Paris, and the next day he finds himself on his road to Glamorganshire. The carriage in which he travels is filled with men, all strangers to him, but who converse freely with one another.

'Have you seen the new owner of Tresham Court, Conway?' asks one fellow of his neighbour.

'What, Sir Roland? Not yet! He is abroad, so I am told, and won't be home till Christmas!'

'By George! Well, if I were the owner

of Lady Tresham the country wouldn't see me that didn't hold her!'

'Is she so handsome then?'

'She's better than handsome! She's one of the sweetest-looking women I ever saw. I met her at General Carroll's last week with the dowager.'

'Fair or dark?'

'Fair as a lily, with glorious golden hair, and great blue eyes as clear as spring water. She's as graceful as a gazelle, too, and got a voice like a thrush. She said she was awfully out of practice, but she sung better than anyone there.'

'I shall get my mother to take me over to Tresham Court,' says a young dandy in the corner; 'a pretty woman is not to be despised in Glamorganshire.'

'You won't get anything by that, my boy,' says the first speaker. 'Handley Harcourt, the dowager's nephew, has found her out already, and is there morning, noon, and night.'

Sir Roland is just about to proclaim that the beautiful woman they speak of is his wife, when the last sentence makes him shrink back in his seat instead. He feels

ashamed to acknowledge her now. What if the scandal should be true! But no, it is impossible! Juliet has been his wife for eight long years, and faithful to him in thought, word, and deed. He would answer for her fidelity as for his own. *His own!* At that thought the hot blood courses through Sir Roland's veins, and mantles in his handsome face. He has *not* been faithful to her—he acknowledges it with shame—but he will atone as there is a heaven above him.

'Gentlemen,' he says suddenly, 'the lady you speak of is my wife, and had you all been at Tresham Court during my absence, 'morning, noon, and night,' it would not have given me a moment's uneasiness.' His confession is naturally followed by apologies, introductions, hand-shaking, and general invitations to the Court. Sir Roland even assures the somewhat shy little dandy in the corner that he has his hearty permission to flirt with Lady Tresham as much as possible. And then they all light up and try each other's cigars, and become the fastest of friends in a very few minutes. Yet as he leaves them at the station, where

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the carriage is in waiting to convey him home, he cannot help wondering at the enthusiasm his wife's looks have provoked amongst them. She *used* to be very pretty in their first wedded days, before she grew so careless of her personal appearance—when she took pride in arraying her graceful little form, and dressing her beautiful hair, but slatternly clothes and unbecoming *coiffure* are sufficient to conceal the beauty of any woman. Well! Sir Roland supposes that such things can be altered, but if he finds that Juliet's bad taste is irreparable, he will be content with her as she is. He has brought enough trouble on her head already—the present shall never be clouded by his reproaches nor complaints. He is so eager to make atonement for the past, that the five miles between the station and Tresham Court appear like ten; but they are accomplished at last, and the carriage rolls through the iron gates and up the wooded drive. Half-way they come upon a group of children escorted by their nurses and a groom. Two beautiful boys in velvet suits, with golden curls falling over their Vandyke collars, are mounted on or-

pony, whilst another animal carries a pair of panniers, from which familiar little faces and blue eyes gaze up expectantly to meet his own.

'Can those be my children?' exclaims Sir Roland to himself; and then he gives the order to stop, and another minute sees him in the midst of them. But what a change! He can scarcely believe they are the same brats who, six weeks ago, used to hang over the garden palings in Camden Town, and put out their tongues at the passers-by—Lily and May in their white frocks and black ribbons, and little Roland in his smart pelisse; and the boys looking such noble fellows in their jackets and knickerbockers, with sunny hair, and clean faces and hands—it seems like a dream to the father as he kisses them all round, and admires the ponies and the panniers to their hearts' content. He strides on to the house with his bosom swelling with pride at the appearance of his little ones, and is almost too pre-occupied to notice that everything is perfectly arranged within the Court and out.

A footman meets him at the door with

the information that her ladyship awaits him in the morning-room, and thither, still in a dream, Sir Roland rapidly proceeds. As he enters the apartment he starts back, thunderstruck with amazement. A lady stands upon the hearthrug—a woman delicately fair, and very lovely, though still too thin and pale, and with tears of expectation and suspense within her eyes.

She is robed in black velvet, fitting closely to her graceful figure—at her throat and wrists are falls of Venetian lace—and her dainty feet are cased in silk stockings and buckled shoes. Her golden hair cut short upon her brow, is piled in innumerable little curls upon the top of her head, which grow longer and longer until they lay in a flossy mass upon her neck and shoulders. For a moment, Sir Roland gazes at this unlooked-for apparition in utter silence.

'Husband!' says Juliet shyly, 'don't you know me?'

'My dearest!' he exclaims, rushing forward and clasping her in his arms; 'how beautiful you have become.'

Then, with the touch of his arms and

lips, all her womanhood asserts itself, and she casts herself, sobbing, on his breast.

'Oh, Roland! forgive me! forgive me! Take me back and love me as you used to do!'

'What have I to forgive you, darling?

'All my ill-temper and impatience and want of fortitude. I bore our lot so badly — I did not deserve to have it bettered — and now that prosperity has come to us, I feel it will be worthless without your love.'

'But you have my love, Juliet! you have never lost it. The ills and discomforts of poverty soured my nature, and made me behave like a brute to you; but my heart has been yours through it all, dearest wife, and I have never been more convinced of the fact than during our present separation.'

She looks up at him and smiles—oh! such a heavenly smile of renewed happiness and hope.

'And, Roland, you are quite, *quite* sure that you love me best of all the world! That there is no other woman dearer to you than myself?'

He has just *one* twinge as she puts the question to him; but men are used to twinges, and he can answer honestly,—

'Not *one*, my love!—not a single one! nor ever shall be. Take your husband's word for it, and let us resolve from this moment to banish the painful memory of the Past, and live for each other only in the Future.'

. . . . . .

And so they have and do, and there is only one thing that Lady Tresham cannot understand, which is Sir Roland's rooted aversion to Lady Ernest Freemantle. He will not let his wife invite her down to Tresham Court, although she has often hinted she would like to visit them, and all the excuse he can give for his conduct is that he does not choose to cultivate the lady's acquaintance.

So the matter rests, and as long as Sir Roland does not renew it, there is no need he should confess the little scene that took place in the gondola on the moonlighted Venice canal.

THE END.

CAPTAIN NORTON'S DIARY.

CHAPTER I.

MUSHIN-BUNDA.

JUNE *4th*, 18—.—Thermometer at 100 in the shade, and up to heaven knows where in the sun; somewhere about boiling heat, I should imagine, if I may judge by the state of my shirt sleeves. A cheerful climate in which to ask a man to spend the best days of his life, for the visionary prospect of surviving twenty years' service and retiring on half-pay. If it were not for Janie, I could not stand it. Here we are, cooped up in an old Dutch fort, with three miles of desert plain between us and the sea; the very house we live in built on the

remains of a cemetery; the ruined graves of which stare us in the face every time we look out of the drawing-room windows. The consequence of which is, that Janie would not stay in the house by herself after dark for any earthly consideration; and if she cannot procure a female friend to dance attendance on her fears, I am cut out of my bachelor entertainments. Not that I wish to complain; far from it; it would be hard if I could not give up some pleasures in exchange for such a wife as mine—but I have found it awkward at times. Then we have no society but such as the regiment affords; and as a married man I am, of course, not so much at the mess as heretofore. Altogether Mushin-Bunda is not lively; and my wife is the only creature who makes it bearable to me.

I don't wonder that the whole cantonment voted me a lucky fellow when I obtained the promise of her hand. The first time I ever saw her at the house of her married sister—the wife of Delville, of our 44th, since ordered to Burmah — I thought her the prettiest, most lovable little woman I had ever seen; and during the

twelve months of our happy married life, I have had no reason to alter my opinion. Janie is all that a man could possibly desire in a wife; and so I tell myself twenty times a day. Never have I seen her face clouded with passion or ill-humour: whatever I propose to do is invariably the thing she has just been wishing for; she never dissents from me either in opinion or desire; she never even meets me without the same quiet smile, which has deservedly gained her the credit of being such 'a very sweet young woman.' She is a cushat-dove, made to nestle into a man's affections and to remain there; for who with a heart could bear to wound the feelings of one so sensitive and pure? I don't believe at this moment, that in all the length and breadth of India there exists a happier or more contented fellow than myself; and if we only had a little more society, a little company occasionally to turn our thoughts from dwelling incessantly upon ourselves, our life would leave nothing to be desired. Not but what my Janie is the world to me; still, a woman is but a woman after all, and the days are apt to become monotonous.

Oh, this horrid Mushin-Bunda! could anything reconcile me to a life-long expatriation in a place like this? The very thought is desolation.

June 6th.—Two days ago I was complaining of the lack of company to be found in Mushin-Bunda. This evening I feel inclined to write myself down an ass, and say that my foolishness has returned upon my own pate, for we are likely to have more company than we care for. I was in the verandah this morning smoking and grumbling, and as I turned from the contemplation of the glaring compound to where Janie sat in her white dress, bending over some letters she had just received, I decided she was the only cool thing within my range of sight. The dogs were lying panting on the gravel with their tongues out. The constant motion of the flapping punkah did not appear to do more than stir the heat. Even the quiet easy-going tailor sitting cross-legged at my feet, could not proceed with his work unless he dipped his black fingers every minute in a bowl of water. Everything looked hot, horrible, and sticky, except Janie herself. But

there sat my cushat-dove—half buried in the flounces of her muslin dress—a fair, plump, placid little woman; the effect of heat on whom is only to make her look more white and cool, with her sunny hair drawn off her tranquil features, and her calm blue eyes riveted on the open letter which she held in her hand. None of your passionate, raving, storming creatures this, who nearly squeeze you to death one moment, and stick a knife into you the next; but a proper sort of woman for a wife and mother, or so I choose to call her; and I really couldn't take my eyes off her moonlight beauty, until I was roused from my reverie by hearing her plaintive voice exclaiming,—

'Oh dear! oh dear! how very unfortunate! Whatever will the poor girl do?'

'Of whom are you talking, my darling?' I asked, as I cast away the remains of my cigar, and advanced towards her.

'Of my cousin Lionne, Robert dear; Margaret Anstruther, of whom I have so often spoken to you. I told you some time ago, didn't I, that in consequence of

her mother's death she was coming out to the care of our uncle, Colonel Anstruther, at Madras?'

'Well, what of it? Has she arrived?'

'No; but this letter is from Uncle Henry, and he is in such a dilemma. He expected Margaret to be with him four or five mails ago; but her guardians have delayed and delayed to send her out; and now, just as he is ordered off to China to join his regiment, he receives a letter to say that she will arrive by the next steamer.'

'And he will have left Madras?'

'Yes; and for six months at least. He does not know what on earth to do about it.'

And Janie, in an uncertain manner, kept turning the sheet of paper over and over in her hands.

'He must ask one of his lady friends to receive Miss Anstruther,' I suggested.

'So he would, Robert, were it not for so long a time. But a six months' visit is too much to expect from any stranger. If Emma were only here, Uncle Henry would have sent Margaret to her.'

'It is certainly very inconvenient,' I remarked carelessly.

'I suppose, Robert dear,' said Janie, in a dubious and hesitating manner,—'I suppose *we* could not offer to take in Margaret till Uncle Henry returns from China?'

I started. The idea had not presented itself to me before, and it was certainly not a pleasant one. I hope I am not of an inhospitable turn of mind; but the prospect of having a perfect stranger located beneath our roof for such a length of time was anything but agreeable to me. I remembered Janie's want of companionship, and the many times I had had to resign the society of my brother-officers on her account, and felt resigned; but the next moment I thought of all my quiet evenings with my loving little wife being broken in upon; of our cosy walks, and talks, and drives being done away with, and for six long months—and I daresay I did look blank. Indeed, I must have done so; for Janie, who is not, generally speaking, what is termed quick of observation, saw the change in my countenance and commented upon it.

'You don't like the notion, Robert dear?' she said, in a tone of disappointment.

'Well, Janie, I can't say I do; but if it must be, it must be. What does your uncle say on the subject?'

'He says it would be a great convenience, of course, and that he does not know to whom else to apply, or he would not trouble us. And Margaret and I were at school together, Robert: we were brought up quite like sisters; so it would seem strange if she were to go to anyone else. And it is only for six months; and Uncle Henry says that he does not expect us to be put to any expense about it, for that he—'

'Oh, blow the expense!' I irreverently interrupted. 'When does Colonel Anstruther leave Madras, Janie?'

'Next week; and Margaret is to arrive the week after.'

'And what arrangements can he make for her joining us at Mushin-Bunda?'

'Mrs Grant, a friend of his, has offered to receive Margaret on her arrival, and to keep her until a steamer starts for here, which will probably not be long first.'

Very well. Write to your uncle, and say that we shall be proud to give Miss Anstruther house-room until such time as he may be able to reclaim her.'

'And you're not vexed about it, Robert dear?' said Janie timidly.

I stooped and kissed her.

'Not a bit, darling,' I answered gaily. 'Half-a-dozen cousins could make no difference to our love; and as long as that remains unaltered, I care for nothing else.' Upon which my little wife brightened up again, and prepared to write an answer to her uncle's letter; and I lit another cigar, and resumed my old position in the verandah.

I told Janie that the stranger's coming could make no difference to me; but I feel that I have not spoken the truth in saying so, and I blame myself for thinking as strongly as I do upon the subject. Surely I am swayed by prejudice.

After all, supposing that Miss Anstruther does remain with us during the whole of her uncle's sojourn in China, where will be the great misfortune of entertaining a young lady for a few months? and how could

we have done otherwise than offer to receive a friendless girl, arriving in the country under such peculiar circumstances? who has also, by marriage, become a connection of my own, and been reared in such intimate relations with my wife, as to be looked on by Janie almost in the light of a sister. It would have been quite impossible to act otherwise; therefore I feel I had better make a virtue of a necessity. At the same time, try as I will, I cannot bring myself to look on the anticipated visit as a pleasure, although I am sure that much of my prejudice arises from my wife's innocent praises of her cousin, which prove Miss Anstruther to be so opposite, in appearance and disposition, to herself, that I feel I shall never like the girl. Well, I was wishing for more society in Mushin-Bunda; and now I shall have it. Some one to dance attendance on, and to mind my p's and q's before, for the next six months; and if I haven't had enough of society before the end of that time, it's a pity. Warren says it's all nonsense; that he had a friend of his wife's once staying in the house for several weeks, and that it

was great fun; and that before Miss Anstruther has been with us half that time, I shall look on her as a sister, and forget all about my p's and q's.

I laugh at the idea, and pretend to agree with him; but it is of no use; a presentiment of annoyance for me seems to cling to the name of Margaret Anstruther, until I wish I had never even heard its sound. However, as I said to my wife, what must be, must be, and the best method of evading a worry is not to think about it. Easier said than done!

June 16th.—If anything were necessary to make me take a still farther dislike to the idea of our expected guest, it would be provided in the fact that Janie and I have nearly come to words about her, for the first time in our married life.

'Come, darling,' I said to her this evening, when at last the fierce sun had sunk below the horizon, and it was possible to quit the house; 'put on your hat, and let us have a little stroll in the compound together, we may not have many more opportunities of walking alone.'

Our 'compound,' as the ground sur-

rounding an Indian bungalow is usually called, is a large piece of uncultivated land, sheltered by lanky cocoa-nut trees, and carpeted with burnt-up turf from end to end, whereof is cut a sandy track, which we term our carriage-drive.

Janie was ready in a moment, and up and down the track of sand we wandered, arm-in-arm, inhaling eagerly the faint breath of sea-air wafted to us from across the plain which separates us from the ocean.

'Oh, Robert dear!' said Janie, casting up her pensive blue eyes to meet my own, 'I wish I had never written that letter to Uncle Henry. I am more sure every day that you don't like the notion of Lionne staying with us.'

I can't think what put the letter or her cousin into my wife's head at that particular moment; for I have not alluded to the subject for several days past.

'My dearest child,' I answered her, 'whether I like it or not is of little consequence. There is no alternative; therefore we must bear the infliction as best we may. Thank heaven, it will not be for ever.'

'But you are not to look upon it as an in-

fliction, Robert,' said Janie, as she squeezed my arm, 'because, directly you see Margaret, you will like her.'

I shrugged my shoulders incredulously.

'But indeed you will,' continued my little wife with, for her, a most unusual display of energy. 'You don't know how nice-looking she is; tall and slight, with large dark eyes and—'

'Yes, yes, I know,' I interrupted impatiently. 'Six feet high, and gaunt as a cab-horse, with flaming black eyes and hair, and a complexion like Spanish olives. I know the sort of woman, Janie; you've described her to me often enough. The less said about her beauty the better.'

'But she's not a bit like that,' said dear little Janie, almost ready to cry at my description of her cousin. 'Lionne is very graceful and exceedingly handsome; every one says so. Indeed, Robert dear, you are quite mistaken.'

'She won't be handsome to me,' I answered, appeasing her with a kiss, 'since she must be so different from yourself, Janie. Nothing will go down with me, darling, except it be golden hair and a

marble skin; and then they must be the hair and the skin of but one woman in the world.' And I looked into the face of my cushat-dove until I made her blush and laugh nervously with her tremulous happiness. Dear little Janie! God keep me ever true to her!—'Why do you call your cousin "Lionne," instead of by her proper name?' I asked, as soon as the billing and cooing episode had somewhat subsided, and we had leisure to revert to the subject under discussion. 'Margaret is pretty enough, and the other has no connection with it, let alone its signification rendering it very unsuitable for a lady.'

At this question my wife reddened; but, after a little pressing, confessed it was a nickname which had been bestowed on Miss Anstruther at school.

'She is a dear, generous creature, Robert dear,' she pleaded; 'but just a little hasty, or at least she used to be; but of course she will have got over all that by this time' (not so sure, thought I); 'and we girls used to call her 'La Lionne' just for fun, you know, and somehow the name stuck to her. Oh, you should have seen

her in a rage!' continued Janie, warming beneath the recollection; 'her eyes used to flash such glorious fire, and she didn't seem to care what she did. Once, when I offended her, she flew at me just like a little cat, and bit me on the arm.' And Janie laughed softly at the remembrance which made my blood boil.

'What a she-devil!' I exclaimed indignantly, as I thought of the fair flesh, of which I was so tender, lacerated by the teeth of a gaunt school-girl with vicious black eyes. 'I should like to have caught her at it!'

Then Janie seemed to think she had said too much, and tried to retract.

'Oh, but, Robert dear!' she exclaimed, 'she is very different now, you know; that all happened long ago; and though we still call her Lionne, it is seldom that she ever gives way to her temper. I have not seen her for some years; but when we last met we had not a word together during the whole period of her stay.'

'And how long may that have been, Janie?'

'For three weeks; and she was so pleasant and kind, you can't think.'

Three weeks! I groaned in my spirit; and we are to endure six months of the company of this lady who is called Lionne, in compliment to the amiability of her disposition, and bites and scratches like a cat whenever she is offended. I began to think of clothing myself and my wife in mail armour during the period of her stay, so that we might be invulnerable to her attacks; but a remark to that effect to Janie seemed greatly to discompose her.

'It is not fair of you, Robert dear,' she said, with knitted brows, 'to take my confidence in such a spirit. It is all nonsense to suppose that Margaret will be like that now; she is a charming girl, who is universally admired.'

'I am delighted to hear it,' I replied sarcastically. 'I hope, however, that she won't take a liking to me; or that, if she does, she will keep her charming teeth to herself.'

'I daresay you won't be troubled with her long,' exclaimed Janie, with a degree of excitement which I foresaw would end in tears. 'Margaret attracts lovers wherever she goes, and we shall have her en-

gaged and married most likely before she has been many weeks in Mushin-Bunda.

'Worse and worse,' I inadvertently replied. 'If I thought that was to be the end of it, Janie, I should cut and run at once.'

Visions of my brother officers lounging about the drawing-room all day, and snarling at each other like rival curs—of a wedding, and all the paraphernalia and fuss attendant on it—made me give vent to the horror which I felt in the anticipation.

'Ah! you didn't think it all so horrid a year ago!' said my wife, melting into the promised tears; 'but I suppose you have forgotten that by this time, or wish, perhaps, that it had never been.'

The conclusion struck me as unreasonable; but when women arrive at that stage they are not in a fit state to be argued with, and are best left alone.

'It's very different when one plays first fiddle in the case, dear child,' I answered soothingly; but Janie was no longer in a humour to be soothed.

'I don't believe you think so, Robert,' she said; 'and as for poor Lionne, I'm sure—'

'Oh, for heaven's sake! let's talk of something else than poor Lionne!' I answered hastily. 'I'm sure we've had enough of her for one evening; and, for my part, I'm getting quite sick of her name.'

It was a foolish, unthinking speech to make; and Janie took it so thoroughly to heart, that she walked away from my side into the house, and had cried herself sick and ill before I had the manliness to find her out and ask her pardon for my rudeness, and promise to try and like her cousin for her sake. I must be more careful of Janie. She is not strong enough to endure much emotion; and she loves me so tenderly, that the least suspicion of unkindness on my part upsets her.

Well, this is the first shadow of a disagreement that we have ever had; may it be the last! That it has occurred on the subject of Margaret Anstruther, is not likely to increase my predilection in favour of that young lady.

June 17th.—I did not go to bed till late last evening, for I was vexed at what had taken place between myself and Janie, and

could not readily compose myself to sleep. However, I did so at last, vowing to endure all the cousins in creation fastened upon me for all time, sooner than bring another needless tear into the tender eyes of my cushat-dove ; and was wakened at gun-fire this morning by the intelligence that the *Ostrich* (the steamer by which we expected Miss Anstruther to arrive) was telegraphed from Coeranapoot, and would be off Mushin-Bunda in the course of a few hours.

Owing to the agreeable peculiarities of the place we live in, I was obliged at once to rise from my bed, and prepare to ride down to the fort, the currents here being of such a nature that vessels cannot come within a couple of miles of land ; and if boats are not ready on their arrival to convey the passengers on shore, they carry them on without ceremony to the next port. I wakened Janie with a dozen kisses, begged and prayed of her to think no more of what happened last night, assured her that I intend to be all that is amiable, and learn to like her cousin as much as she does, and having thrown myself into my clothes, departed full of good resolutions,

leaving her childish face radiant with smiles, and beaming in expectation of the coming meeting.

As I turned my horse out of the compound, I met a brother officer, Forster by name, also mounted, and riding apparently in the same direction.

'Where are you off to so early?' I inquired.

'I am going on board the *Ostrich*,' he replied, 'to try and get a sight of my friend Dunn, who is to cross to Burmah in her. Will you come with me?'

'It is where I am bound for. I am on my way to meet Miss Anstruther, my wife's cousin.'

'Lucky dog!' said Forster. He is one of those fellows who imagine that no age, position, or circumstances are powerful enough to prevent a man admiring a pretty woman. 'If all I have heard about her from Dunn is true, you are not likely to have your house much to yourself whilst Miss Anstruther is in it, Norton.'

'Well, I shall go out of it, then,' I answered, not over pleased at the notion of never being left in peace with Janie.

'Dunn says she's beautiful. I didn't know you expected her in the *Ostrich*. He'll never believe now that I went on board with the intention of seeing himself.'

'He must have but a small opinion of your friendship for him.'

'Ah, yes, perhaps; but this is not an ordinary occasion. From all I hear, Norton, Miss Anstruther must be—you'll excuse my saying so—a regular out-and-outer.'

'Indeed! You know more about her than I do. She has not been above a week or ten days in Madras.'

'I know; but Dunn was introduced to her in England, and quite excited to find she had come out to this country. Will she remain long with you?'

'Till Colonel Anstruther returns from China,' I replied, with an inward sigh.

'Lucky fellow!' repeated Forster, with a grin. 'Don't you wish he may lay his venerable bones there?'

I did not feel equal to pursuing this conversation in the strain which Forster evidently expected of me, and so I tried to turn it.

'The tide is very high to-day,' I remarked, as we rode into the fort, and came in sight of the sea.

'By Jove! so it is; and yesterday it barely washed the landing-quay. What a sell it would be, Norton, if some day this sea, with its changeable tides, was to take it into its head to overflow the fort and flood the cantonment!'

'How *could* it?' I exclaimed, hastily.

The idea is ridiculous, and as ridiculous my feeling annoyed at it, for I have never heard it mooted by any one before; and yet it is not a pleasant one; for the plain is so very level, and we have no protection whatever from the encroachments of the ocean.

'Well, I don't know,' he answered; 'but I think I've read of such things. It would be a regular washing for these poor devils in the fort, though, wouldn't it?'

'Don't talk of anything so horrible!' I answered.

And then we hailed a boat; and dismounting from our horses, gave them into the charge of their native grooms, and were soon dancing over the sunny waves.

It was dancing with a vengeance; for the cross-currents are so various, that at one moment we were driven a long way out of our course, and the next shot back again in the opposite direction with a rapidity which threatened to upset the frail structure to which we had trusted ourselves. Meanwhile the *Ostrich* steamed slowly into sight, and took up her station at the usual distance from land; whilst we beat about the harbour for more than an hour, wondering if we should ever board her; and half afraid, more than once, that she would depart again without our having accomplished it. But we were successful at last; and the first object which I saw on reaching the deck was the figure of a girl, sitting apart by herself in a distant and reserved manner, which I immediately singled out as that of Miss Anstruther, and the sequel proved that I was right.

'Is Miss Anstruther on board?' was the query which Forster put to his friend Dunn, as they met at the head of the gangway.

'Yes, she is,' was the reply; 'but I can't say I've seen much of her. She seems

very different from what she was in England last year. But I think she hates this country, and—'

'Dunn, this is my friend Captain Norton; allow me to introduce you. Mrs Norton is Miss Anstruther's cousin, Dunn; he has come on board expressly to meet her.'

'Oh yes, of course; very happy, I'm sure,' said Mr Dunn; and in consequence no farther allusion was made to Miss Anstruther's likes or dislikes.

Meanwhile I found the captain, and got him to introduce me to the young lady. It was a proud cold face which she turned towards me as my name was mentioned to her, and the hand she offered lay very passive in my grasp; but she said all that was pleasant and polite, and intimated that her luggage was ready to be put into the boat, and she to follow me at any time, so that there was no reason for delay; and after I had assured her how eagerly Janie was on the look-out for her arrival, and she had bidden adieu to the captain, we prepared to return to shore. We were obliged to have two boats on account of the luggage; and what was my surprise to

see Forster slip down after us into the second, as though he were one of the party.

'You have deserted the company of your friend Dunn very quickly,' I remarked to him. 'The *Ostrich* does not leave for another hour. I thought you were going to breakfast on board.'

'I thought of doing so,' he answered carelessly (he had been talking of nothing else on our way there); 'but perhaps it's better not—might miss the boat, you see, which would be awkward. Will you introduce me to Miss Anstruther?'

I went through the required formula; but after the customary acknowledgment of it, Miss Anstruther took no further notice of Mr Forster or myself, and the conversation, after several ineffectual attempts to draw her into it, was kept up between us alone. Meanwhile, I could not help stealing an occasional glance to where my wife's cousin sat, calm and silent, gazing on the bright glancing waters, and answering the occasional remarks directed to her with a smile which was almost too faint to be called so. Only once did I see the expres-

sion of her face change ; and that was when the cross-current caught the boat and drove it all slanting and edgeways, like a bird across the bay, with a velocity which, for the moment, considerably unsettled each of us. She grew a little paler then, and I saw her hand (rather a nice hand, by-the-bye) grasp the seat which she occupied ; but still she said nothing.

'Don't be frightened, Miss Anstruther,' I interposed hastily ; 'there is no real danger. The native boatmen are so skilful that it is very seldom a boat is upset here.'

'Thank you,' she murmured, in answer to my information, and for a moment her eyes met mine (she has fine eyes, certainly) ; and the next time the boat was driven out of her course I saw, by the unmoved expression of her face, that she remained at ease.

I suppose it was very courageous, and all that sort of thing ; but I don't think I liked her any the better for it. A woman, in my idea, is a creature to be protected, and not to take care of herself. I remember how Janie shrieked and screamed and clung to me when I brought her on shore

in one of those very boats; and I think I should have liked it better if Miss Anstruther had exhibited a little more fear. However, everybody is not like my Janie. When we landed at the fort, Forster, who is our adjutant, was obliged to leave us, and allow me to take my guest home in a carriage; but though she talked a little more when we found ourselves alone, she was anything but sociable; and I was thankful when we had turned into our own compound, and I could tell her to look out for Janie on the steps. There was my little bird, of course; all fluttering with pleasure at the delight of meeting her cousin again; and as soon as Miss Anstruther had reached the porch she flew into her arms, and her happiness found vent in a burst of excited tears. I expected to see the stranger follow suit, knowing that women often cry most when they are most pleased; but not a drop fell from her eyes. She clasped my wife very closely to her, it is true, and I saw her lip and nostril twitching; but she showed no further signs of emotion, though Janie did tell me that, after they had passed into the

bedroom together, her cousin indulged in what she technically termed 'a good cry.' However, of this I knew nothing. The two girls (Janie is but eighteen, and Miss Anstruther a year older) remained closeted together for more than an hour; and when they reappeared at the breakfast-table they looked as fresh as their muslin dresses, and as far from tears as the day was from rain.

And now, what am I to say of Miss Anstruther's personal appearance? She is certainly very different from what I imagined—altogether different. I will acknowledge so far; and yet I don't know if I am agreeably surprised in her or not. She is tall and slight, though not at all thin, with a lithe figure which reminds me of a leopard or some such animal; and every time she moves I expect to see her take a waving serpentine leap which shall land her noiselessly on the opposite side of the room; which peculiarity brings so forcibly to my mind her nickname of 'Lionne' that I have very nearly called her by it more than once to-day. Her complexion is pale and sallow (Janie calls

it 'creamy'—so I suppose that is the right name for it), and her eyes, which are enormous (much too big, in my opinion; I dislike startling eyes in animals or women), are black, and very variable in their expression. Her nose is straight, and rather sharp; and she has an absurdly short upper lip, with a deep channel in the centre of it—in fact, scarcely any upper lip at all. But she has a pretty set of teeth (I record this fact to show that I am not permitting myself to be in the least swayed by prejudice), and apparently a large quantity of dark hair—at least Janie tells me that when unbound it reaches to her knees.

Still, although doubtless she can boast of some good features, to call such a woman beautiful is absurd; and one has only to see her stand side by side with my rosebud wife to perceive the worse points which she possesses. It brings out at once, as I made Janie laugh by observing, all the yellow that is in her. She is not so plain, perhaps, as I expected; but 'beautiful' is the last epithet I should apply to Margaret Anstruther. No woman

who is not fair can possibly be pretty; and how any man can *prefer* a dark face is to me inexplicable.

June 18th.—She certainly is a most extraordinary girl, and even more disagreeable than I thought her yesterday. We really got on so well together the first day; she chatted so pleasantly during the forenoon to Janie and myself, and sung to us in the evening (she has not got a bad voice by any means), that I began to think I had made a mistake about her cold, reserved manner, and that if her visit were to last for six weeks instead of six months, it might not prove such an affliction. And so, wishing to make myself agreeable, I told Janie this morning at breakfast that she must be sure and order a very good dinner, as I intended to ask some of my brother officers to dine with us. I knew that Forster and others were anxious to make Miss Anstruther's acquaintance; and a bright thought struck me this morning, that if I manage well we may get her engaged and married, and out of the way altogether in the course of a month. Of course, it will be a great deal of bother;

but it will be much better to get it over in that manner than to have it spun out for several months, and to wind up perhaps with a wedding after all. So I have determined to be very hospitable, and keep open house for the next few weeks; and I sha'n't let Janie interfere with her cousin in any way; and we will see what that will do. My wife opened her blue eyes when I informed her of the impending guests, and said no one had called on Miss Anstruther yet.

'Of what consequence is that?' I said. 'The whole regiment will call this morning, and I know they will be dying for an invitation afterwards;' and I nodded in a knowing manner at Miss Anstruther, as much as to say that I knew all about it.

'I hope you do not invite them on my account,' she said, curtly, answering my look.

'I invite them on their own,' Miss Anstruther. 'You do not seem to know your value. Young ladies are very scarce in Mushin-Bunda; you could not have come to a better place, if you want to have it all your own way. I don't think you will find a rival here.'

'A glorious thought to goad one on to victory,' she said, sarcastically, and her manner seemed to change from that moment. She became again reserved and haughty; and when I returned home from my professional duties, Janie met me almost in tears, with the intelligence that she was sure dear Lionne was not well, for she had scarcely spoken a word all day, and had sat so silent during the visits of the officers of the regiment that Janie had had all the talking to do.

'Never mind!' I answered soothingly; 'she will be different after dinner. A glass of champagne will thaw her reserve, and draw her out of herself.'

'But I so much wished that they should admire her,' said dear little Janie in a despondent voice.

My predictions, however, with respect to Miss Anstruther were not verified. She looked very handsome this evening in a sweeping white dress ('handsome' is the correct term of her style of beauty; no one could call her 'pretty,' like Janie for instance, but she certainly looks handsome, particularly by candle-light), but nothing

prevailed to make her sociable; neither my champagne nor my wife's coaxing could induce her to talk or sing as she did last night. She spoke in monosyllables, and professed herself too tired for any display; and the five men whom I had asked to dine with us sat alternately talking to my wife, and staring at her guest, until the time for their departure had arrived. Janie sung us two or three ballads in her sweet plaintive little voice, but we had heard them before, of course, and should have been glad of something new. But all our pressing and entreaty were in vain. Miss Anstruther said she was too fatigued to sing; and declining even to sit amongst the company, stood by a window gazing out upon the night. Presently, almost too vexed at her singular behaviour to remember my politeness, I approached her side, and said, perhaps rather abruptly,—

'Why won't you sing for us?'

'Because I don't choose,' she answered, fearlessly.

'I thought so,' I said; and turning away I quitted her again, and took a

seat by Janie's side. But after a while some fascination, for which I am unable to account (but which has been felt at times by all people who on earth do dwell), made me feel that Miss Anstruther was regarding me, and lifting my eyes, I encountered the glance of hers fixed on my face. She withdrew them quickly; but not before their gaze had made me feel uncomfortable—a sensation which I attribute to the fact of their colour, which I have never liked, and believe I never shall.

The rest of the evening passed dully enough, and I am sure Janie was as relieved as I was when our friends rose to take their leave, and Miss Anstruther disappeared in the privacy of her own room.

'You can't say that Mademoiselle Lionne has made herself very agreeable to-night,' I exclaimed rather triumphantly, as Janie and I found ourselves alone.

But Janie was hardly a subject to be triumphed over, she was so very humble and apologetic.

'I can't think what is the matter with

her, Robert dear; but I assure you she is not sulky. Only this moment she put her arms round my neck and kissed me—oh, so nicely! but I don't think she likes dinner-parties. We won't give another.'

'Not like dinner-parties!' I exclaimed.

'No—nor men. She told me she wouldn't sit in the drawing-room to-morrow morning.'

'Not like dinner-parties or men!' I exclaimed, aghast at the intelligence. 'And how the deuce is she to get married, then?'

'Perhaps she doesn't want to get married,' said Janie demurely.

'Doesn't want to get married!' I growled. 'Don't tell me such nonsense! If she doesn't want to get married, what is she out here for?'

'Oh, hush! Robert dear; don't speak so loud,' interposed my wife, as she laid her little hand across my mouth. 'Do remember, her room is the next one to this.'

So the conference was stopped, and I cut into my dressing-room to write my diary. But I never heard such nonsense,

and I wouldn't believe it on the girl's own oath. Not like men or dinner-parties, forsooth! It is only a young lady's trick to attract attention by appearing to decline it. We shall never get rid of her at this rate.

N.B.—Her eyes are not black. I was mistaken. They are grey, and not such a very dark grey either, except when she is annoyed. It is only in some lights that they look black. They are fine eyes; but more suited, I should think, to war than love.

June 19th.—In some way or other I have offended my lady, for she will hardly speak to me; and when I proposed to drive her to hear the regimental band play this evening (Janie not being well), rejected my offer with a decision which amounted to scorn. Yet she stayed by Janie's sofa (so I was told afterwards) during the whole term of my absence, bathing her head with eau de Cologne, and fanning her, and attending to all her wants in the most womanly manner; so I suppose she has some good in her, after all. But so have serpents and tigers, and other

beasts of prey. All I know is, that I'm not going to be insulted by a girl in my own house, and I shall let Miss Anstruther feel this by keeping up a distance between us, and treating her with the coldest reserve. Just when I had been forcing myself to show her politeness, in spite of all the repulsion I feel to her society, to have my offer rudely rejected is more than any man can stand. It makes my blood boil to recall the tone in which she told me she was 'infinitely obliged,' but thought, on the whole, she would rather 'remain at home.' She may remain at home for ever for me now; it will be a long time before I offer to take her out again.

June 21st.—We have been at it now for two days, bowing to each other when we meet, and scarcely exchanging a word except in the most formal manner. Janie sees the change, of course, and is wretched about it. She keeps turning her wistful glances from one to the other, as if to entreat us to make it up and be friends; but when she appeals to me in private, I tell her that it is the fault of her cousin, who is the

one to make the first advances towards reconciliation, as I have not the slightest idea in what I have offended; and when she talks in her turn to Lionne, I believe she hears pretty much the same argument. I hope, however, for all our sakes, that this kind of thing won't go on much longer; for I know that it's deucedly disagreeable, and that I've never felt at home since Miss Anstruther came into the house.

June 23d.—Colonel Anstruther has sent up a fine Arab from Madras for the use of his niece, and to-day it arrived under the charge of its native groom, rather foot-worn and travel-stained, but otherwise in good condition. It is such a beautiful creature, and my fancy for horses is so strong, that I really couldn't help coming a little out of my shell on its arrival, and expressing my admiration of its various points to its mistress. She also seemed to forget herself in her pleasure in the new acquisition; but when I remarked that she would now have some delightful rides, and would find no lack of cavaliers to accompany her in Mushin-Bunda, the old expression re-gathered on her face,

and she retreated to the house, and sat for the greater part of the evening in her own room. What an unpleasant woman! I would rather she bit me than treated me like this, and suggested to Janie that the alternative would be pleasant for a change. But Janie wouldn't laugh; she is too really unhappy about the state of things.

June 25th.—Matters remained *in statu quo* until to-day; but the thaw has come at last, and, as it should do, from the female side. The horses were brought round this morning, as usual, to eat their 'gram' in front of the house; and the Arab, having enjoyed two days' rest and a thorough grooming, looked in such good condition, that Janie was eager in her entreaties that her cousin should take her first ride on him this evening, and form an opinion of her new acquisition. Knowing that my attendance would be necessary (I have never been able to persuade Janie to become a horsewoman, she is far too timid), I made an effort to be more agreeable, and joined my persuasions to those of my wife; but Miss Anstruther would

give no definite answer, and rather put the question to one side than otherwise; so I thought no more about it. Going towards the stables, however, in the afternoon, I saw the Arab standing ready saddled in his stall; and hearing it was by order of the 'missy,' concluded that I had either misunderstood her reticence, or she had changed her mind; so, telling the horsekeeper to get my animal also ready, returned to the house to hear what plans had been made in my absence. There I found Miss Anstruther standing by herself in the verandah, ready attired for her ride, and looking better in her hat and habit than I remember to have seen her look before.

'Janie has a headache, Captain Norton, and is lying down until dinner time. I believe she is asleep,' she said, as she observed the roving look I cast about in search of my wife.

'Ah, poor little woman, it will be the best thing for her,' I replied. 'The horses will be round directly, Miss Anstruther; but I am sorry you did not make me understand your intention of riding more

plainly; it was quite by chance that I returned home so early.'

At this she turned and regarded me with serious surprise.

'I had no intention of troubling you,' she said quickly; 'I can ride by myself.'

'By yourself, and on a strange animal, Miss Anstruther! It is quite out of the question.'

'I have ridden all sorts of animals.'

'Perhaps; but not without an attendant. What would the regiment think to see you riding alone?'

'I am sorry, I have mistaken the place,' she said gravely. 'I thought Mushin-Bunda was so very quiet that one might do anything here. I should not think of troubling you to accompany me.'

And she turned towards the house as though with the intention of giving up her ride. But I placed myself upon the threshold, and barred her entrance.

'You have not been treating me fairly for some days past, Miss Anstruther. What have I done to offend you?'

'Nothing,' she answered in a low voice.

'Then don't add insult to your injury

by refusing my escort on this occasion. You need take no more notice of me, you know, than if I were your groom; and that will not be much alteration from your usual behaviour.'

She held her head so low that I could hardly see her face; but she re-entered the verandah as I spoke, and I concluded that my terms were accepted. In another moment the horses were at the door.

'Come,' I said, as gaily as I could, as I held out my hand to aid her in descending the steps; and as I took hers, I felt that it was trembling. I put her on her horse. Notwithstanding her height, she is almost feather-weight; and her elastic figure sprang into the saddle, from the impetus it received from me, as though she had really been the animal to which I am so fond of comparing her. So I settled her in her seat, arranging her skirt and stirrup-leather for her, and handing her the reins, without once looking in her face; and then I mounted my own horse, and we rode out of the compound side by side. The silence that we maintained was ominous. She did not speak a word,

and I could think of nothing to say, although I felt that an explanation was about to take place between us. I was glad, therefore, when we came to a long strip of green turf, and I could suggest that she should try of what mettle her animal was made; a suggestion to which she dumbly assented by breaking into a canter. As we rode along together, I glanced at her light figure, poised like a bird upon the saddle, and saw that she rode well, sitting home to her crupper, and handling her reins as though she were accustomed to them.

(*N.B.*—I have read and heard a good deal about the want of grace in a woman's seat on horseback, but, for my own part, I never think a lady looks so well as in that position, always provided that she understands her business and has a figure worth looking at. A handsome woman on a handsome horse is a sight for royalty, and I never know which to admire most, the mortal or the equine.)

We cantered for a mile or more, and the action of the Arab seemed very perfect. I made an observation to this effect, when,

having left the running horse-keepers far behind us, we at last drew rein, and found ourselves alone. But still my remark received no answer, and I was determined to make her speak.

'Am I intruding too much upon my privileges, Miss Anstruther, in venturing an opinion on the subject? Even a groom is sometimes permitted, you know, to pass his judgment on the new acquisitions to his mistress's stables.'

'Don't, Captain Norton; oh, pray, don't.'

The words were uttered so hurriedly that I scarcely understood them; but when I looked into her face for an explanation, I saw that she was crying. Now I cannot bear to see a woman cry. They may do anything they like with me—tease, bully, even insult me—so long as they keep their eyes dry; but Miss Anstruther's tears were falling fast upon the bosom of her riding-habit.

I could not endure to think that she might be annoyed with me and my bantering; perhaps unhappy at having to live at Mushin-Bunda, for it is a very

dull and uninteresting place; and I said the first thing which came into my head.

'My dear girl, what *is* the matter with you?'

I suppose the question was stupid or ill-timed, or perhaps I don't understand the ways of women, for instead of doing Miss Anstruther any good, it changed her silent tears into such a storm of grief that I was quite alarmed. I have often seen Janie cry (indeed, my little woman is rather fond of working her hydraulics on very small occasions), and I have been the unwilling witness at times to a good many tears from various members of the fair sex; but never in all my life have I seen such a tempest of passionate rain as poured from Margaret Anstruther's eyes this evening. She sobbed so violently and with so little restraint, that I began to be alarmed for the effect of her emotion, both on her horse and herself, and begged and entreated her to be calm, when all of a sudden, to my astonishment, the storm passed as quickly as it had arisen; and, except for her heaving bosom and sobbing breath, she was herself again.

'What must you think of me?' she inquired, turning her liquid eyes, still swimming in tears, upon my countenance. 'I must have seemed so rude, so ungrateful to you both.'

'Think!' I stammered, remembering all I have thought of her conduct during the last few days; I don't think anything, Miss Anstruther; only I am afraid you cannot be happy with us or here.

'Oh, it is not that!' she exclaimed earnestly. 'Neither place nor people can make any difference to me. Dear Janie is everything that is kind; and you—you have been very patient with me—but nothing can lift off the humiliation, the degradation, that I feel in being here at all.'

'Degradation!' I repeated, rather nettled at the term.

'Yes, degradation!' she said emphatically; 'else why am I in this country? what is my place in India? I have an uncle here, it is true; but so have I uncles in England. Why was Colonel Anstruther chosen by my guardians as the one most fitted to offer me a home? Tell me that.'

'He is rich, and a bachelor,' I commenced; 'and living alone, naturally—'

'It is not so,' she interrupted me; 'and you know it, Captain Norton. It is because he lives in a country where women are scarce, and men have few opportunities of choice; where a girl may pick up a husband who might remain for ever unmarried at home; where we are looked at on arrival much as though we were articles of sale, and often purchased for motives unworthy the name of love or honour or esteem. You cannot deny it, because it is true, and I am wretched;' and with this Lionne buried her burning face in her hands.

'But I can deny it!' I exclaimed; 'for if this is the case with some girls sent out to this country, it is not with all. Look at your cousin Janie; surely you would never speak of her in that strain.'

'Janie came out to the care of her sister, her nearest relation,' was the low reply.

'And you have come out to your relations, Miss Anstruther; to friends who have but one wish, to see you happy and

comfortable, and who would never dream of imputing such motives to an action which—'

'Did you not dream of it?' she retorted quickly, as she turned her glowing glance upon me. 'What was the question that you put to Janie the second evening of my arrival. "If she doesn't want to get married, what is she here for?" I ought not to have heard it, perhaps, but you spoke so loudly that it was impossible to avoid doing so. And do you think I didn't feel it?'

She spoke so decidedly, and yet so mournfully, her eyes flashed with such proud indignant fire, whilst her figure seemed bowed beneath the weight of her humiliation, that I had nothing to say for myself; and having attempted some stammering reply, which ended very abruptly, found that she was speaking again, though more to herself than me, and felt myself constrained to be silent and attend.

'I saw it from the first day I landed,' she went on sadly. 'I perceived in Mrs Grant's insinuations, and the remarks of her lady friends, that I was supposed to have been

sent out to India with but one object—to get a husband; and it sickened me. But when I came here,' she added in a lower voice, 'I hoped it would be different; I hoped that you and Janie, being so lately married, would look on love and marriage in a holier light—as something too far removed from earthly calculations to be made the subject of mere speculation or convenience.'

'Oh, Miss Anstruther, forgive me!' I exclaimed.

'It is I who should have said those words, Captain Norton. You disappointed me, and I have disappointed you. You raised in me a demon of a temper, which I should have been ashamed to manifest, which I am now most heartily ashamed even to recall. And you have been very patient with me, very good and very gentlemanly. Please forgive me, in your turn.'

And she placed her hand firmly and warmly into mine.

'You are too kind,' I stammered, confused beyond measure at this rapid change of manner in my guest. 'I spoke thoughtlessly;

but I see that I misjudged you. Only tell me now what you wish to be done, and I will execute it to the letter.'

'I don't deserve that you should do anything, Captain Norton, but hate me for a rude and sulky wretch; but I am so heartily sorry to have annoyed you.'

'Let us forget all that,' I responded, earnestly; 'the annoyance was mutual, and I was the most to blame. Only tell me what to do in future, Margaret—I may call you Margaret, may I not, since we are cousins?—in order to make you happy, and then I shall feel that I am quite forgiven.'

'Treat me as a human being,' she answered, gaily, 'and not as an animal for sale. Don't ask your brother officers to the house on my account, nor thrust me forward for their contemplation in any way. Look on me as what I am: a creature who may stand alone all her life, and be contented so to stand; to whom marriage is but a chance in the future; so great a chance indeed, and so undesired a certainty, that she does not even care to contemplate it nearer; to whom her friends, if they will

be her true and honest friends, are more valuable than a score of admirers.'

'Whatever I have been, you shall have a true and honest friend in me henceforward, Margaret.'

'That's right; so let us look upon our difference as settled, and make Janie's heart glad by the beaming faces we take back with us. And now, let me hear your true opinion of my uncle's present to me.'

We discoursed gaily on in different topics till we reached home; when Janie was indeed made glad (as Margaret had predicted) by the cheerful conversation we maintained at the dinner-table, and the little bit of confidence I reposed in her when we found ourselves alone. She was so delighted to think I should appreciate her dear Lionne at her true value at last. Not that I told Janie every word that had passed between her cousin and myself; for, added to its being unnecessary, I am not sure that my little girl would understand Miss Anstruther's feelings on the subject, or properly respect her pride. She would mention it again to her probably; and in her simplicity, wishing to be kind and in-

terested, try to sift her reasons to the bottom, and perhaps annoy where she desired to please. So I only said that our quarrel was altogether done away with, and would never be renewed ; and that, as her cousin seemed to prefer a quiet life, we would inaugurate no farther dinner-parties on her account ; which would suit us better, I concluded, and be more in accordance with our usual style of living. To all which my wife heartily agreed ; and I feel more at charity with myself and all mankind than I have done for some time past. I shall keep my word with Margaret Anstruther ; and extend no farther encouragement to the bachelors who may come lounging about my house. It is a strange taste on her part ; but she must be a girl in a thousand to dislike admiration, and to look upon careless attentions as an offence against the solemnity of marriage. It *is* a solemn thing, when you come to think, that if you make a mistake upon the subject, you are in for it, and nothing can pull you out again. I wonder if Margaret has had an unrequited attachment ; I should not be in

the least surprised were I told so; it would be quite in accordance with the grave, melancholy expression of her eyes, and her dislike to society. I must try and discover.

CHAPTER II.

JULY 20*th*.—Is it possible that I can have let nearly a whole month slip away without writing a line in my diary? I had no idea of it till I saw the last date inscribed here; and the month itself seems to have gone so swiftly, that had it not been for this reminder, I should have imagined it was not more than a week since I recorded my experiences. I suppose it is the monotony of the place which makes the time go so fast. My poor little Janie has not been well during this month: the heat has been unusually trying, and she lies on her sofa half the day, suffering from nervous headaches, and a general disinclination to get up and do anything. In this emergency her cousin has been invaluable; she is constantly by her side,

reading to her, writing her letters, or amusing her with quiet conversation; indeed, I may say we share the duty, for, of course, I like to wait on Janie; and the novels which Margaret brought out from England with her are very entertaining to listen to, and to me an entirely new field of fancy, as I have scarcely ever looked into a work of fiction in my life. I imagined novels, particularly modern ones, were such rubbish; and so I suppose they are. Yet, on a hot day, and when there is nothing else to do, it is very pleasant to sit still, fanning Janie and listening to Margaret's mellow voice as she reads them to us. We are engaged upon the *Newcomes* at present. I pity that poor devil Clive, with such a little fool as Rosy for a wife, and especially when he might have had a girl like Ethel Newcome. I didn't care a pin about the story at first, but I feel quite interested in it now, and anxious to know if he gets rid of Rosy by any means, so that he may marry the other. I think it will be very hard lines if he doesn't. Margaret laughs at me, and says I am a bloodthirsty mon-

ster, and that Clive should be made to abide the consequences of his folly; and so, I suppose, by rights he should.

What a genial laugh she has, and how pleasant it is to see her blush and smile! I can understand now what Janie means by calling her complexion creamy; it is so smooth and equable, not easily flushed, but at the same time not liable to become florid and irritable-looking, which is so often the case with fair skins. We have certainly had some very quiet peaceful days together. I have faithfully kept the compact I made with her to be her friend, and I think she appreciates my wish to give her pleasure. We have had no parties since she expressed a contrary desire, and I have even told Forster—who is evidently most absurdly spoony on her—that she does not favour his suit—as I can see by her manner towards him—and that he really must not come to the house so often. He says, 'Why not let him try his luck?' but I am firm in making him understand that trial would only end in disappointment for himself. He grumbles; so do several others; but my wife's state of

health is sufficient excuse for our not entertaining at present. I told Margaret of what I had said to Forster relative to her not liking his attentions, and she blushed so crimson that I stopped in alarm to ask if I had done wrong; but she assured me to the contrary, and that she does not like the man. I have not had a good opportunity yet of probing her concerning that former attachment of which I am suspicious; but I fancy I see signs of it almost every day; also that she has somehow guessed at my intentions, for I am sure she has avoided being alone with me lately. Notwithstanding all which we are very happy, and Lionne is very different from what I expected her to be. She has not been in a temper once since we arrived at that mutual understanding.

July 21st.—Talk of the old gentleman, they say, and he is sure to appear. I hope I did not raise the slumbering demon in Miss Anstruther's breast by my innocent remark of last night; but she has certainly given us a peep of him since.

I was sitting in my own room this afternoon, occupied with some official

papers, when I heard a confusion of tongues in the compound, and Janie's frightened voice, in tones of agitation, entreating me to go to her assistance. I ran, of course, to find that the cause of her alarm was a loud altercation going on between Miss Anstruther and some natives in the back verandah.

'Oh, do go to them, Robert dear!' Janie plaintively exclaimed; 'Lionne is so angry, and I can't think what for.'

I dashed upon the scene of action, and took in the circumstances at a glance. In the centre stood Lionne—a *lionne* indeed, looking—I could not help observing it, even whilst I blamed the exhibition—most beautiful under the influence of her rage. Her dark face glowing with passion, her arm extended, though powerless to command attention, and her lips pouring forth a torrent of generous indignant words, alike uncomprehended and unheeded by those around her. By her side stood two or three servants, who stared at the lady's vehemence without attempting to execute her wishes; whilst before her, in the compound was a group of natives actively em-

ployed in torturing a poor pariah dog by methods too horrible to relate, and only abating their cruelty to exchange significant grins and glances with one another at Lionne's impotent rage. But my appearance amongst them had the effect of an electric shock upon the herd.

'What is all this about?' I demanded angrily of my servants. 'How dare you let such a scene go on in my compound?'

'Oh, Robert! Robert!' exclaimed Lionne—it is the first time in her life that she has called me by my Christian name—'stop them; make them leave off such horrid cruelty. I did not know you were at home, or I would have sent for you before.'

The natives had already shrunk back and huddled together, whilst the unfortunate victim of their experiments still lay panting on the sand before us.

'Oh, look at it! look at it!' she cried excitedly; 'it is in agony; it is dying! Oh, you wretches! you inhuman, barbarous savages!' with an expression and emphasis which must have made even her English phrases intelligible to the creatures

she addressed; 'I should like to see every one of you served in the same way. You are not men, you are devils!'

'Lionne,' I said firmly, as I laid my hand on the excited girl's arm, 'this is no place for you. Leave me to deal with these men by myself.'

She shook off my grasp impatiently, as though disdaining my control; but I caught her eye and chained it.

'Margaret!'

'But, Captain Norton—'

'Go in to Janie—you have frightened her enough already—and leave me by myself. I will come to you by-and-by.'

She saw I was in earnest, and with a heightened colour turned from the verandah and re-entered the house, where, after having severely reprimanded my servants, thrashed one or two of the natives, and seen the tortured animal put out of its misery, I followed her. She was seated by Janie's couch, her hand clasped in that of her cousin, her beautiful head drooped and lowering. I saw that she was ashamed of what had passed; and so I made no

reference to it, but asked my wife in an indifferent tone on what she had decided to do this evening. She had decided on nothing—in fact, she wished to do nothing, but to be left to lie still in peace. So, after a while, I proposed a stroll in the compound to Miss Anstruther; and she rose to her feet and prepared to follow me.

I think I have already spoken of our compound, which is full of graves. These graves are very inconveniently situated for a gentleman's pleasure-grounds; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that the gentleman's pleasure-grounds are inconveniently situated for the graves, which stretch up to the very windows of the house, and by their inequality greatly impede the facility of a stroll. We stumbled over them, and made circuits round about them, for some time in silence, until both that and the exercise seemed to become oppressive; and by mutual consent, as it were, we sat down together on a broad flat stone which covers one of them; and for a few moments neither of us spoke. Then I stole a glance at Margaret's face, and saw that it was still clouded and downcast; and I

felt a strange longing to see it brighten up again and smile upon me.

'I am sorry you should have been witness to so painful and disgraceful a scene, Miss Anstruther,' I ventured to remark.

'I am sorry you should have been witness to so painful and disgraceful a scene, Captain Norton,' she echoed gloomily. 'Mine was the worst exhibition of the two: I see it now plainly. Oh, what a wretch you must think me! What an undisciplined, passionate, unwomanly creature!' and up went her hands as shelter to her burning face.

'Please don't call yourself names; I can't subscribe to them. I think you only what you are—a generous, warm-hearted girl, indignant at the sight of wrong, only inclined to be a little too hot and hasty in expressing your indignation. Never be afraid of falling in my good opinion by showing your true nature, Margaret.'

'But my nature is so bad, Captain Norton; you cannot think how bad it is. My temper is so violent; and when it rises, I remember nothing else, except that I am angry and must show it.'

'If you never display it in a worse cause, Margaret, than you did this afternoon, you cannot go far wrong. It was a disgraceful and disgusting act of cruelty.'

'Oh, was it not cruel,' she eagerly exclaimed, 'to torture one so utterly defenceless and unarmed? I could look on at men, or dogs, or any creatures of equal power, fighting with each other, and applaud the victor; but when it comes to one against such fearful odds, one innocent creature suffering because of its innocence, I cannot bear it. Many such sights would kill me; I think that I should burst with rage.'

'And yet in this world, Margaret, it is usually the defenceless and the innocent who suffer.'

'We who are strong should shield them,' she answered, hastily.

I wonder what made her link her nature with mine in that word 'we?' And yet I feel that I am strong—as she is. The tombstone on which we were sitting professes to cover the remains of two lovers who died within a few hours of each other. I told her the story, as it has been related to me by one of our officers, who has taken

the trouble to decipher the old Dutch letters upon the stone, and asked her if she believed it possible that grief could have such an effect as to kill within so short a space of time.

'It seems unlikely,' she replied indifferently; 'but natures are so various. If true, she must have loved him very devotedly.'

'And you are the last person to believe in such affection,' I remarked. I thought it would be a good occasion to find out if she had ever had an unfortunate attachment.

'What makes you think so?' she answered quickly.

'Because you have never tried it—have you? You have never been in love yourself, Margaret?'

I spoke laughingly; but I wish I had not mentioned it. A scarlet flush mounted to her very forehead as I said the words; and when I pulled her by the hand and repeated my assertion, she burst into tears, and ran from me to the house. What a fool I was to touch on such a subject! I don't believe, all the same, that it is true,

that she has ever been in love; but I may have wounded her sensitive pride by mentioning it, and cause her to be reserved with me in future. Indeed, I am sure that she behaved more distantly towards me even during the remainder of the evening; and a little circumstance which happened just before we went to bed confirms me in this opinion.

Janie was quite brisk and lively compared to what she has been lately, and sung us several songs; but Lionne excused herself from singing, and remained in a corner with her face buried in a book.

'Make her come, Robert dear,' said Janie playfully. 'Go and pull her out.'

'Captain Norton knows better than to attempt such a rudeness,' was the measured reply, which fell rather as a wet blanket on the other little woman's mirth.

'Why do you call him Captain Norton?' she said, pouting. 'You called him Robert this afternoon when you were in the verandah, Lionne, because I heard you. Why can't you do so always?'

Miss Anstruther had disappeared still

lower behind her book; but to my wife's demand she made no reply.

'Why won't you call him Robert?' said Janie, as she rose from the piano and took possession of her cousin's book; 'he always calls you Margaret.'

The face which she thus disclosed was crimson, and the dark eyes swam in a blurred mist which was half tears. So painful indeed was the expression of the whole countenance, that I turned away, and could not contemplate it.

'Because I can't, I really can't,' was the reply at last extracted.

'And why not?' persisted Janie.

'It is not pleasant to me; I do not wish it,' said Miss Anstruther, until I felt myself constrained to interfere, and desire Janie not to tease her cousin.

So she released the glowing face with an expression of impatience at her obstinacy, and Miss Anstruther made use of her liberty by effecting an immediate disappearance. This confirms me in my impression that I offended her in the compound this evening, and that it will cause a difference in our future intercourse. I am very

much vexed about it: I had really begun quite to like the girl. And I cannot dismiss from my mind the tone in which she said the words, 'We who are strong should shelter them.' Does she imagine that I am not capable of acting a generous part? I should like to have some opportunity of showing her what stuff I am made of.

July 30th.—I have been very much vexed to-day; and though the circumstance appears trifling, it threatens to lead to serious results. When we first arrived in Mushin-Bunda—now some eight months ago—I, in common with others of my regiment, heard several absurd stories concerning the houses supposed to be haunted in the cantonment and its neighbourhood—(natives always have a stock of such lies on hand, with which to feed the imagination of any one fool enough to listen to them); but of course I placed no credence in their statements, which only excited a smile from their stupidity. *This* well was said to be the quarters of a devil, for which cause no one would ever draw or use the water from it; and *that* clump of bamboos to harbour another, which, issuing in the

form of a boa-constrictor, attacked those who were hardy enough to linger in the compound after dark. With regard to our own house, I heard that the spirits of the dead who lay buried beneath our windows had been seen to wander about at night in their grave-clothes; but of course I took care that such rubbish should not reach the ears of my wife; equally of course I forbade my servants chattering about it, and never gave the subject another thought. What was my surprise and vexation, therefore, when I returned home this afternoon, to find my wife supported by her cousin in a state of hysterical agitation, whilst she listened to the garbled statements of half-a-dozen natives, who all talked together, and interrupted one another, and did everything they could to render their relation as confused and unintelligible as possible. My 'chokra' or 'dressing-boy' was gesticulating in Hindustani; the butler was vociferating in broken English; and the cook in his native tongue of Tamil; whilst the 'maty' and tailor and 'cook-boy' tripped over each other in any words they could first lay hold of. Margaret was

looking incredulous and a little scornful; Janie was all tears and flushed cheeks and wide-open eyes; and for the moment I was struck speechless with astonishment to think what could possibly have happened during my absence.

'What is all this about?' I exclaimed, as I advanced to the centre of the group.

The servants fell back, conscious they had no business there, and evidently somewhat doubtful of my reception of their news. But Margaret gave a sigh of relief at my appearance, and Janie flew to my arms as to an ark of safety.

'These men have been frightening Janie out of her wits,' said Margaret in a tone of annoyance; 'and all I could say was insufficient to stop them.'

'What is it, my dear?' said I, addressing my wife. 'What have they told you?'

'Oh Robert, do take me away!' she answered with a convulsive shudder. 'I never shall be able to sleep in this house again. They say they have seen it: a dreadful thing all in white, walking about the graves, and moaning to itself, and wringing its hands. Oh, Robert dear, do

let us go! It will come into the house next; I am sure it will. I shall die of fright if you don't take me away at once.'

She clung to me like a terrified child, and as I marked her burning face and felt the feverish clasp of her hands, I could not tell what injury these idiots might not have done her by their folly.

'What do you mean by this?' I inquired sternly, as I turned to the group of natives.

Then they began to cringe and salaam before me, as they attempted to repeat the story which had so alarmed my wife. But I would not permit them to do so, but ordered them all out of the room, and turned my attention towards soothing Janie's fears.

'You must not be a child, my dear Janie,' I said, as I replaced her on the sofa, and arranged her pillows for her. 'These natives are always full of their stupid ghost-stories; but you know better surely than to believe such folly. There are no such things as ghosts, therefore how could they have seen one?'

'Oh, but indeed—indeed, Robert, it is

true!' she said with painful earnestness. 'They saw it themselves only last night, and they say it is like a woman with long hair down her back; and when they tried to touch it, it vanished away.'

At this I could not help laughing.

'A pack of heroes!' I exclaimed. 'Why, Janie, there is not one amongst them man enough to inquire into such a mystery, even if they saw it, which I don't believe. I've a good mind to give them a hiding all round to make their eyesight a little clearer.'

'But what should be their object in repeating it?' inquired Janie fearfully.

'If you will condescend to listen, my dear, you will always find them ready to talk. They are full to the brim with such idle tales. You should refuse to hear them, and send them about their business.'

'Oh but, Robert, can't we go away from this house? I never could bear those graves, and now I shall be more frightened of them than ever.'

'Janie, I thought you were more of a woman,' I said reproachfully. 'Where could we go to? You know that all the

houses in Mushin-Bunda are occupied; to which fact poor Janie assented with a deep sigh.

'But, at all events, you won't go out this evening, Robert, will you?' she continued imploringly. 'I could not bear to stay in the house alone with Margaret and that awful thing.'

I was engaged to attend a public dinner at our mess this evening, for a couple of officers of the 18th are passing through Mushin-Bunda on their way to England, and we wished to show them a little civility. I had been looking forward to the occasion (one sees so few strangers in this place); but I told my poor little timid wife that I would give it up and remain at home with her. However, Miss Anstruther very kindly came to my assistance, and, begging me to keep my engagement, promised not to leave Janie for a single moment till my return. Upon which, although with much reluctance, the other consented to my leaving her; and as soon as I could get away, I went after my servants to learn what folly had induced them to fly into the presence of their

mistress with such a rumour. I found them almost as frightened as herself, and, oddly enough (for you can generally catch a native tripping when you cross-examine him), perfectly firm in adhering to their first statement. Their story is, that as three of them were returning to their godowns (as they call the huts in the compound) rather late last night, they saw a tall figure dressed in white wandering about the graves, and moving its hands in a distressed manner; and that, as they cried out at the sight (for natives are terribly superstitious and cowardly), they wakened the other three, who ran out just in time to see the figure vanish round the house, and they were too much alarmed to follow up the search. In relating the story to me they dropped all mention of having touched the supposed ghost, being aware, I suppose, that I was not likely to credit such an act of bravery on their parts. I spoke to them all six, both together and individually; and it is curious that I could not make them contradict themselves in the statement that they have seen such an apparition. Of course it is

all nonsense. They saw something doubtless; most likely Janie's 'ayah' in her white cloth, out without leave; but as for a ghost!—folly!

I scolded them well all round for a pack of idiots, forbade their mentioning the subject again, and threatened them with the stick and stoppage of wages if they were ever the means of carrying such stories to their mistress's ears; so I hope we have heard the last of the ghost. However, the fright has evidently done Janie no good. When I returned home from mess this evening, I found that she had had another violent attack of hysterics, and that her cousin had thought right to send for our doctor, who happened to be at his own house. He reports my wife very nervous and feverish, and orders her to be kept as quiet as possible. I would give a thousand pounds this moment, if I had them, sooner than this story had reached her ears. She is so sensitive and timid, and her health is at present so delicate, that I fear the shock may have some ill effect upon her.

July 31*st.*—Janie better, but still feverish.

Miss Anstruther watches over her like a sister. After they had both retired to bed to-night, I sat at the window for more than a couple of hours, hoping to see something which might account for the servants' story, but nothing was visible. The bright moon lit up the compound till it appeared almost like day, and the air was so still that I must have heard the slightest rustle; but I neither saw nor heard anything except my own breathing and the smoke from my cigar. What awful fools these niggers must be to believe in ghosts at all!

August 1st. — Janie was on her sofa again to-day, and so cheerful, that I hope she has already forgotten her alarm, and that the remembrance may never be revived. But what has come to Margaret Anstruther? She looked so careworn this afternoon, so haggard and miserable, compared to her usual appearance, that, after asking her what was the matter, without obtaining any satisfactory response, I ventured to remark that I hoped the ghost-story had not had any effect on her. The start which she gave on hearing my words, and the flush which mounted to her

face, would almost have made me think that inadvertently I had struck a right chord, had not the supercilious smile with which she repeated the word 'effect' denied the expression of her countenance.

'I thought it could not be the case,' I said apologetically; 'but you are really looking so ill, Lionne. Will you not come for a ride this evening?'

No; she declined to ride or to walk; she only desired to remain by Janie's side and minister to her comfort. So be it, then. I suppose it is natural she should prefer her cousin's company to mine, though I am not aware that I have done anything lately to make her shrink from me as she appears to do.

August 4th.—The ghost has appeared again—or rather Janie imagines she has seen it, which is just as hurtful to her health and spirits. She had seemed so merry all to-day, and so far removed from the fanciful fears engendered by the natives' stupid story, that after she and her cousin had retired to rest I took my cigar up to the roof of the house, as the heat has been most oppressive lately, and I longed for a

breath of fresh air. Our house (like most others in Mushin-Bunda) is built with a flat roof, surrounded by a high parapet, which roof is reached from the verandah by a flight of steps so much resembling a ladder, that it is not often I can persuade the ladies to mount it. But, for my own part, I am constantly in the habit of taking my book and pipe (not to say my glass of brandy-and-water) to this elevated retreat, and, when there, thinking on anything or nothing, as the humour may take me. To-night my thoughts were not very cheerful ones; for, without any especial reason, I felt what is technically termed 'dummy.'

Perhaps it is the excessive heat, perhaps the continued weakness of Janie, but somehow life has not appeared quite so sunny to me lately as it used to do. I feel so weary by the time the day is at an end, and so dissatisfied with the manner in which I have spent it, and I seem to rise each morning with some undefined hope which is never realised. I suppose it is the monotonous life we lead which breeds discontented thoughts; we so seldom encounter anything to draw us out of

ourselves and our own concerns. And Margaret Anstruther's disinclination to society has increased this disadvantage; for we three—Janie and she and I—have been thrown completely on each other for company during the last two months. And yet they have not passed unpleasantly. It is strange that I, who so much dreaded this interruption to the quiet life which I led with my wife, should be able to write those words and mean them.

Yet I do mean them—though, at the same time, I cannot believe that the interruption has made me any happier, for I don't think I ever felt so restless and unsettled as I do at present. I keep on fancying that something is going to happen to me; and start to remember that there is nothing at all the matter, and that if I have a cause for dissatisfaction, it must rest with myself. It *must* be Janie's illness that affects me in this manner; it is so unnatural to see the poor little woman always lying on the sofa, instead of running about with her cousin and myself.

I had been dreaming somewhat after

this fashion on the roof of the house to-night, for how long or how short a time I should have been quite unable to say, when I was startled from my reverie by hearing a most piercing scream in Janie's voice and proceeding from Janie's bedroom, which sounded so shrill and alarming, as it rung through the still night air, that, though I rose at once to my feet, I felt for the first moment so paralysed with fear, that it was not until the cry had been repeated that I ran down to her assistance. I found her in a half-fainting state on the sill of the bedroom window, which was wide open; but my appearance changed her condition to one of hysterical weeping, which, whilst it was more painful to witness, greatly relieved her. Meanwhile the native servants, lying about the verandah on their mats, were slumbering as heavily as is their nature, and would not have awakened of themselves had the cry been twice as piercing, the alarm twice as great.

'My darling!' I exclaimed, as I took the shivering form of my wife (shivering with fear, not cold) into my arms and

pressed it to me, 'what can have startled you? Have you been dreaming?'

'Dreaming!' she repeated in a faint whisper. 'Oh no, Robert, I was not dreaming; I was wide awake, and it passed close to me.'

'*It*—*it*—what do you mean, Janie?' though I had guessed at once her fancy.

'The ghost, Robert!—the dreadful ghost! Ah' (with another convulsive shudder), 'I shall never, never forget the sight!'

'*The ghost!* my dear girl, you have really been dreaming. Where do you fancy you saw it?—in this room?' for I had entered the room by the window by this time, and still sat on the sill supporting my wife in my arms.

'I did not *fancy*,' she replied, with an earnestness which proved that she thought she was right; 'it passed so close to me, Robert, that I could have touched it with my finger. Ah, why did we ever come to this fearful place!'

I lifted her up and placed her on her bed again, and then, without releasing my hold of her trembling fingers, I sat down beside her and entreated her to tell me

all. 'Let me hear how you saw the ghost, and where, Janie; and perhaps I may be able to account for the apparent mystery. And first, why did you leave your bed at all? What waked you? You were so fast asleep when I left you.'

'I don't know what waked me,' she said nervously; 'perhaps the heat, for I felt so restless that I could not sleep, and after a good deal of tossing about, I got up and walked to the window to cool myself, and see if you were in the compound anywhere. I was not thinking of the ghost, Robert, indeed I was not; but directly I reached the window I saw it—ah, just as they told me, wandering about the graves!'

'Janie dear, indeed you must be mistaken; it was the moonlight shining on the white lining of the silver bamboos, or—'

'Robert!' she exclaimed, starting up in bed as she clutched me by my arm, 'I tell you I *saw it*. It was no fancy, but a tall woman dressed all in white walking in and out of the graves.'

'You are sure it was a woman?'

'Oh yes; oh yes; because, when I

screamed, it turned round and came close by this window, and it had long hair hanging right down its back. Oh, Robert, I thought I should have died!'

'My poor girl,' I answered, as I forced her to lie down again, 'I am not going to have you frightened in this abominable manner. This is some trick on the part of the natives; to what end I cannot imagine, but they shall pay dearly for their little game. Where did this woman go after she had passed the window?'

'Oh, I can't tell, Robert; I don't know; but I think it vanished round the house.'

'Well then, if you will let me leave you, Janie (I will call the ayah to come and sit by your bedside), I will just look round the compound, and see if I can find any one loitering about.'

'Oh, don't go after it, Robert; pray don't go ofter it; it might hurt you.'

But I could not wait to silence any more of Janie's fears; had I stayed to reason them all away, I should have been kept prisoner till morning. I roused the ayah, bid her stay with her mistress till I returned, selected a thick stick from my

whip-stand, and proceeded on my voyage of discovery. As I did so, I glanced at my watch, and discovered to my amazement that it was past one.

What a time I must have been dreaming on the house-top!

I searched the compound and all the accessible portions of the house thoroughly, but I found and saw nothing. I wakened all the slumbering occupants of the 'godowns,' to see if they had any strangers amongst them, but only my own domestics came yawningly to be inspected, and certainly not one of them answers to the description of the supposed ghost. As I returned, I rapped at the closed venetians of Miss Anstruther's bedroom, and, to my astonishment, her voice replied to me immediately.

'What! are you awake, Margaret?' I demanded. 'Was it the noise disturbed you?'

'What noise?' she asked, as she came near to the venetians.

'Janie's scream. She fancies that she saw the ghost (which I hoped she had almost forgotten), and that it passed close under her windows.'

'Poor child!' in a voice of compassion. 'No, I did not hear, or I should have gone to her; but I have not been long awake;' which, indeed, her voice seemed to testify.

'Why are you out of your bed?'

'I cannot sleep; it is so hot,' she answered with a deep sigh.

'And you have seen nothing?'

'Certainly not; and have been sitting at the window till within a minute ago. I have only just closed the venetians because the moon is so bright. It must be all Janie's fancy.'

'Of course it is her fancy that she has seen a ghost,' I answered; 'but I am not so sure about her having seen nothing at all. However, I shall find out more about it to-morrow; meanwhile I must not keep you up any longer. Good-night.'

'Shall I go to Janie?' she asked in the same sleepy tone she had employed before.

'No, thank you; I am going to her myself.' And with that I passed on to resume my guardianship over poor Janie and her terrors. But I am determined to

follow up this mystery until I am enabled to dispel it; for which reason I shall watch, night after night, for the appearance of the person who dares to act 'ghost' in my compound until I see him; for which reason also I shall keep my watching a secret even from Janie and Margaret.

Meanwhile I pooh-pooh the subject to my wife, who easily takes her cue from me, and will laugh at her own alarm by this time to-morrow.

N.B.—She must rest with closed venetians until this mystery is unravelled; and I will steal out of bed after she is fast asleep, and spend my nights upon the housetop, which commands a view of every part of the compound. And if I catch the ghost, woe betide his bones; for if I don't make them rattle, it's a pity!

Meanwhile, thinking over matters, it seems strange to me that Margaret Anstruther, sitting at her window, should not have heard the scream which reached me so easily upon the roof; or that, at all events, the conversation which subsequently I held with my wife should not

have been patent to her, as her room is next to ours. However, she appeared half asleep, even whilst she spoke to me; for her voice was low and dreamy, and I could hardly catch her words. I wonder what prevents the girl sleeping! The same mania seems to have fallen upon all of us; for I don't feel myself as though I should close my eyes to-night, and every now and then, as I steal a glance from my writing-table to the bed, I see Janie's blue orbs wide open, and watching for the moment when I shall rejoin her. So I lay down my pen, and go to afford her the protection of my presence.

August 6th.—I spend my nights now like a sparrow, on the housetop, so am obliged to write my diary in the daytime. I watched from eleven last night to four this morning; but I saw nothing. The air was so jolly and soft, that I had great difficulty in keeping myself awake; but with tobacco I managed to do it. Janie wondered that I was so sleepy after parade this morning, and accused me of growing abominably lazy and old. She has almost recovered her fright again, I am happy to

say. Miss Anstruther, on the contrary, looks worn and ill. I don't think this climate can agree with her. I wish she would consent to see the doctor who attends Janie.

August 7th.—Was on the roof again all last night. If, under the pursuit of knowledge, it were only allowable for me to fall asleep, it would be much pleasanter than remaining downstairs. Towards three o'clock I thought I had caught the ghost; for I distinctly saw a 'tall figure, dressed all in white,' hovering about the graves; but it proved to be only an early milkman, going to recover his cows from their jungle pasture-ground, who thought to make a short-cut by passing through our compound. This was provoking, after I had taken the trouble to rush down after him, stick in hand, fully prepared to administer a wholesome castigation. But this fact tends still more to confirm me in my belief that what Janie saw was a native wandering about in the moonlight after his own business.

All domestic servants, and a good many other classes, habitually wear white cloth-

ing ; and nothing would be easier, when the imagination is in a heated and unnatural condition, than for one to mistake their appearance for that of a ghost. However, I shall not yet give up my search for the delinquent.

August 9th.—I have now watched four nights without seeing anything, and I am beginning to get rather tired of the joke. If the ghost doesn't soon make his or her appearance, I shall resume my lawful place of rest, and wait patiently until it sees fit to call upon me.

August 10th.—At last I have seen the so-called phantom ; and had it been a lost spirit sent from the nethermost hell to inform me of my future fate, my hand could hardly shake more than it does now, in recalling the recollection. But not for the reason which made its appearance one of terror to the native servants and to my poor Janie.

My terror, my horror, and my shrinking arise from a totally different cause, and make me wonder, as I write, that I should have heard what I heard last night, and live to repeat it.

I wish I had not lived; I wish that I were dead!

I was on the roof, as usual, very tired, rather dispirited, and more than half-disposed to throw up the whole affair, and go downstairs to bed. Where was the use, I argued with myself, of watching night after night in that fashion for a ghost which never came? I was convinced that I was troubling myself for a mere illusion—that the phantom had never existed, except in Janie's imagination, or that if a trick had really been played upon my wife by some of the servants, the rascals had discovered that I was watching for them, and were too wide awake to repeat it until I should have given up pursuit. And then with my eyes always fixed upon that part of the compound where the old Dutch graves are thickest, I lit a cigar, and watching the thin wreath of smoke which curled from it into the air, sighed to think how transitory all happiness is in this world, and how seldom one's earthly wishes, even when realised, fulfil the promise of their attainment; until I sufficiently forgot myself, and the purpose of my being on the house-

top in the middle of the night, to permit the soothing influence of tobacco, added to a soft light breeze, which fanned me as delicately as though I had been a sleeping infant to lull me off into a doze. How long I slept I can hardly tell; but I know that I woke with a start and a shiver, and that the first thing I did was to rub my eyes, and quickly turn them in the direction of the tombstones and the graves. What was that which I saw wandering up and down that plot of ground, just as I had been told it was wont to do? Was it hallucination or reality? Had the impression with which I fell to sleep remained upon the retina of my eye to delude my waking fancy? or was that which I gazed upon a thing of flesh and blood? I rubbed my eyes again, and shook myself, to be assured that I was quite awake; and then I advanced to the parapet and leant well over it.

Yes, it was no mistake. A female figure (or a figure dressed up so as to look like a female), clothed in white, with long dark hair streaming down her back, was feeling her way, rather than wandering up and

down, between the rows of graves, and, with her hands stretched out before her, seemed to be muttering or murmuring to herself. I gave myself but time to be assured that I *did* see it—that it *was* there; and then I grasped my stick and loaded pistol, and prepared to descend and encounter it.

'Take heed, my fine fellow,' I said to myself, as I carefully picked my way down the flight of steps which led to the verandah; 'don't insult me, or attempt to frighten me, as you value the brains in your head, or a whole bone in your body. I can bear as much as most men when I am put to the test; but I won't have my wife frightened out of her wits for the lives of all the niggers in the world.'

I slunk beneath the shadows cast by the verandah, past the places where my servants lay asleep to that side of the house where are situated the bedrooms of my wife and Miss Anstruther, and was glad to see that the venetians of both windows were closed, so that I trusted no alarm might reach their ears.

And now, though I was close upon it,

the figure seemed to take no notice of my presence, but still walked cautiously up and down between the rows of graves, whilst it kept up a sort of moaning to itself. It looked so strange and unearthly as it thus wandered beneath the moonlight, that I felt myself shiver as I gazed at it, and yet my belief in the whole business turning out a trick was strong as ever.

So, after a pause, just sufficient to permit the figure to get as far as possible away from the vicinity of my wife's bedroom windows, I sprang after it; and just as it had turned again towards the house, we met face to face. What was my surprise, my consternation, in the ghost which had caused us such trouble and vexation to encounter—Margaret Anstruther! Yet there she was, no clothing on but her light night-dress; with her unbound tresses streaming over her shoulders, and her bare feet pressing the turf as though it pained them.

'Good God!' I exclaimed, as I staggered back at the sight of this earthly apparition, far more alarming to me than

if I had seen twenty ghosts; 'Margaret —Lionne—what are you doing here?'

At the sound of my voice she halted, and turned her head slightly to one side, as though to listen; and then by the moonlight I perceived to my horror that her eyes were lifeless although open, and that she was walking in her sleep. I had never encountered such a sight before, and for a moment I knew not what to do.

'Was that Robert?' she murmured, presently, in a low, husky voice utterly unlike her own, and as though she were addressing herself, or nobody.

'Yes, it is I,' I answered, trying to control my agitation and my tones. 'Margaret, why are you here? why have you left your bed?'

'Oh, Robert, Robert!' she exclaimed, with an expression of anguish which I shall never forget, 'save me, save me!'

'From what am I to save you, Lionne?'

'From yourself—from yourself, and from me—from my weakness and my folly. Oh, don't let me fall! don't let me fall!'

Although she still spoke dreamily, the sightless orbs which she had turned upon

me were contracted with pain, and I saw that her whole frame was trembling, I ventured to go close to her, and gently take her hand.

'You shall not fall, dear Lionne,' I whispered to her; 'trust to me. I will lead you the right way.'

'*Dear Lionne!*' she repeated to herself, '*dear Lionne!* he says to me, *dear Lionne!*'

What was that quick fear which seized me as I listened to her unconscious words? What that trembling which assailed my limbs, and rendered me incapable of moving either backwards or forwards? The fear and trembling fell so suddenly upon me, that I had hardly time to realise their presence, until they had resolved themselves into a knowledge, fearful as a thunderbolt from heaven, but certain as that I live—or I must die!

I love her—and she loves me! We have destroyed each other's happiness.

As this conviction smote me, I dropped her cold fingers, and sinking down upon the hillock beside which she stood, buried my face in my hands.

Good heavens! how was it that I had

never anticipated this—never seen it coming—never dreamt of such a contingency? —that I had spent day after day in her company; reading with her, singing with her, riding with her, listening to her amusing conversation, watching all her womanly kindness to my wife (ah, my poor wife!), contemplating her beauty from hour to hour, and never once suspected that I might grow to love her more than was good or right? And she, the girl whose advent I had dreaded, whose manners I had so disliked, whose beauty was to me no beauty at all!

Ah, Margaret, Margaret! you may have your revenge now if you will, in the assurance that never, never more shall the remembrance of that fatal beauty be purged from my existence.

All was now explained; her worn looks and dispirited appearance; my own restless and uneasy sensations; the guilty feeling had been growing in us, surely though unconsciously, for many long days past, and needed but some such accident as the present to warm it into life.

Have I not reason to wish that I were dead ?

I did not sit upon the hillock long ; something was waiting to be done, and that was not the time for thought. I could not even stay to watch her as she again commenced to pace beneath the moonlight, with the evening breeze playing with her flimsy raiment, and making it cling about her graceful figure. I felt that she must be coaxed to return into the house, and that I was neither the right person nor in a right state of mind to do it.

So I rose quickly, and explaining the circumstances to Janie's ayah (an old woman with more sense than the generality of her tribe), directed her how to speak soothingly to the young lady, and persuade her to return to the house, where she need be none the wiser for the untimely stroll which she had taken ; and after a little while I was relieved to see the white hand in the grasp of the dark one, and the two women, so unlike each other in all outward appearance, pass into the house together.

So now it is all over ; and the grey dawn

is here; and as it was not worth while for me to turn in before going to parade, I sit down to transcribe the particulars of this adventure before I forget it.

Shall I ever forget it?

I am aware that henceforward, and before the world, I must play a part; but it is useless to dissemble with my own heart. This night has revealed to me what I had rather have died than hear, but the truth will make itself known.

I love her with my whole heart—passionately, fervently, devotedly, as I have never loved before. What is to come of it? What is to become of her, of me, of Janie? Are we all to be sacrificed?

As I write, there come into my mind these sentences: one which fell from her mouth (sweet mouth, that shall never be mine!), and one which proceeded from my own:

'We who are strong should shield them;' and, 'You shall not fall, trust to me —I will lead you the right way.'

No, dear Janie, poor innocent child! and you, my beloved one, do not fear. I will shield both the weak and the strong;

you shall not suffer for my imprudence or my guilt.

Yet how to comfort, how to cure, how to make up to *her* for the misery I have entailed on her dear head? Oh, my God! the task will be a hard one!

CHAPTER III.

AUGUST 11*th*.—I returned from parade this morning tired, feverish, and with a weight upon my conscience as though I had committed an unpardonable crime. I felt as if I dared not face my injured wife, still less the woman who has usurped her place in my affections, or rather who holds the place in which the other should have reigned.

Yet I was not only obliged to encounter both of them, but to go through all the formalities of daily life, without which perhaps the trial would have proved too much for my endurance.

Janie was the first; for since her illness she has not risen to breakfast, and I have been in the habit of carrying in her tray for her. It was with a shaking hand that

I lifted it to-day; and the poor child noticed the difference in my demeanour, and asked me tenderly if I were ill or tired. I had not quite made up my mind, before that, whether I should inform Janie of her cousin's propensity for somnambulism or not; but as I met the trusting glance of her blue eyes, I resolved to do so, not only because it was a thing which might occur again and frighten her as before, but also that by confiding even so far in my wife, I seemed voluntarily to place a wider barrier between Lionne and myself. Therefore I sat down on the bed, and first binding her to secrecy, I related to her how I had spent my late nights upon the roof of the house, and by that means arrived at a solution of the mystery which had alarmed the native servants and herself.

'Didn't I tell you that your ghost would prove to be nothing?' I said, trying to speak gaily, in conclusion.

'Oh, Robert dear,' was her reply, 'do you call poor Lionne walking in her sleep nothing? I think it is horrible—almost as bad as a real ghost; and if I had been

you, I couldn't have gone near her for worlds. I should have died of fright first.'

'But, Janie, you see that I am not a silly little girl, ready to believe every idle tale which is repeated to her. And you must show yourself to be a wise woman on this occasion, and be very careful that the story does not reach your cousin's ears, as the knowledge is likely to make her worse instead of better. I shall give the ayah orders to hold her tongue, and sleep outside the door in future, so that Miss Anstruther may not wander about again unobserved.'

'And I mustn't tell Lionne, then, that you caught her?' said Janie, in a voice of disappointment.

'Certainly not,' I replied, decidedly; and I rose to leave her, only half-satisfied that my wishes would be respected. Janie would not disobey me knowingly for the world—she has never attempted such a thing; but her little tongue goes so fast, that she is apt to part with a secret before she knows that it has left her keeping.

When I returned to the breakfast-room, Lionne was already there, pale indeed and

rather silent, as she has been for several weeks past, but showing no signs that she was aware of our nocturnal meeting. But as I took her hand in mine, I felt the blood rush up to my temples, and my morning greeting must have been nearly unintelligible to her.

Why did I behave so foolishly? She is in all respects the same woman whom I met yesterday with an ordinary salutation—her manner even has not altered towards me; and yet the mere consciousness that that of which I had been vaguely dreaming is reality, was sufficient to make me almost betray what I feel by the expression of my features.

Is this my boasted strength?

We took a silent meal, and altogether an unprofitable one. I had no appetite; Lionne only trifled with the eatables upon her plate; and I think we both felt relieved when the ceremony was concluded.

I did not see her for the remainder of the morning, for I made an excuse of business, and took my tiffin at the mess. When I returned home at five o'clock, however, I found Janie earnestly persuad-

ing her cousin to take a ride on horseback.

'Do make her go, Robert dear,' she exclaimed, as soon as I came upon the scene of action. 'She has not ridden for weeks past, and she does look so pale. I am sure it will be good for her; you know it will, Robert,' with violent winks and blinks which were sufficient in themselves to make the uninitiated stop to inquire their reason.

'I daresay it will,' I answered, obliged to say something. 'Won't you be persuaded?' addressing Lionne.

She hesitated a little, but had no good reason to advance for her hesitation; and after a little more pressing on Janie's part, retired to put on her habit.

'I am *so* glad that she is going,' exclaimed my poor little caged bird, clapping her hands at her success. 'Take great care of her, Robert; she is so kind to me.'

'I will take care of her, Janie,' I answered, earnestly, 'and of you too. You may trust me, my dear; at least I hope so.'

'Of course you take care of *me*, sir,' she replied, with a pretty pretension of pouting;

'because I am *your wife;* but I am not so sure about my poor cousin.'

'Be sure, then, Janie, if you can. I shall try to do my duty by both of you.'

'Who talked of duty?' cried my wife, shrugging her shoulders. 'I never saw any one grown so grave as you have, Robert; you never seem now to be able to take a joke.'

I defended myself from this accusation on the plea of having found several grey hairs in my moustache last week; and before Janie had done laughing at the idea, Miss Anstruther re-appeared, and I lifted her on her horse as though she were an ordinary friend to me, and my hands did not tremble under the burden of the creature I loved best in the world.

We rode on in silence together for some moments, and then I turned my horse's head towards the sandy plain which I have before mentioned as lying between us and the ocean, and told her that I was about to take her down to the beach, that she might derive a little benefit from the sea-breeze.

'Colonel Anstruther will not think that we have been taking sufficient care of you,

Margaret, if we send you to him with such pale cheeks as you have now. I am afraid you find the hot weather very trying.'

'I never liked the hot weather, even in England,' she answered vaguely, whilst the rich blood mounted to her cheek beneath the scrutinising glance which I had turned towards her.

Our beach at Mushin-Bunda is hardly to be called a beach; for it possesses scarcely any shingles, but is composed of hillocks of loose sand which never stay in one place two nights together, but are ever shifting quarters, and are about as treacherous footing for an animal as one could desire. We passed over these carefully, however, and then we found ourselves upon the lower sands, which are daily washed by the sea, and rendered firm and level. Here we halted; for it was low tide, and the refreshing salt breeze fanned our hot faces, whilst the horses we rode stretched out their necks, and dilated their nostrils as though to drink in as much of it as they could.

Still we were very silent, and under the knowledge which had come to me the night

before, the silence was even more oppressive than usual.

'This is delicious!' I exclaimed at last; 'worth coming farther than three miles to enjoy. This will do you good, Margaret.'

'Yes,' she sighed. 'What would one not give for a little of it occasionally during these hot nights!'

'You do not sleep well,' I said, struck by a sudden impulse.

She coloured as I addressed her; but that is nothing new.

'I don't think I sleep badly,' she replied, after a pause. 'I seldom lie awake for any length of time, but—'

'But when you rise in the morning, you feel unrefreshed and tired.'

'How do you know that?' she demanded quickly.

'I guessed it, Margaret. I guess it from your looks, your demeanour, your languor. I know that you do not rest properly at night, and that if you will not take seasonable advice you will be ill.'

'I am not ill,' she answered in a low voice.

'But you will be, which, under present circumstances, would greatly distress Janie.

Will you not consent to see a doctor—if not for your own sake, for ours ?'

I thought that physical care might in some measure relieve the mental disturbance under which she labours, or, at all events, prevent a repetition of her somnambulistic tendencies by which her secret may, some day, be made patent to the world. I never imagined she would guess my meaning ; but the next moment I saw the mistake which I had made.

'What have I been doing ?' she exclaimed, turning round with a rapidity for which I was totally unprepared. 'What have I been saying ? Tell me at once, Captain Norton ; don't keep me in suspense.' And her dark eyes blazed upon me as though they would search into my very heart.

I trembled beneath the look, and was dumb.

'Why do you think I cannot rest—that I shall be ill ?' she re-demanded almost angrily ; and then reading the truth, I suppose, in my confused demeanour, she added in a lower voice, a voice almost of terror, *Have I been walking in my sleep ?'*

The ice was broken, then; and although I still felt very uncomfortable in speaking to her of the circumstance, I did not see any other course open to me than to tell her briefly of my endeavour to find out the reason of my wife's alarm, and the consequences which had ensued from it.

'I had not wished to mention this to you,' I said apologetically, 'and only the directness of your question should have drawn it from me. However, as it is, I daresay it is for the best; for though the occurrence is a common one, it is as well to guard against its repetition.'

'*What did I say?*' was the only reply which she made to my concluding observation.

I had so slurred over the fact of her speaking at all that I hoped it had escaped her notice; but the tone in which she put this question portended that she meant to have it answered.

'What did I say to you, Captain Norton?' she repeated firmly.

I began to mumble something about the words of sleep-walkers being always unintelligible, but she brought me back to the point.

'You must have heard me; in fact, I can see by your face that you *did* hear. What was it that I said?'

'I was so sleepy, Margaret,' I commenced, but I felt my voice shaking audibly,—'so sleepy, and altogether so confused, and my memory not being of the best, that I—I—really I—'

She gazed at me for a minute earnestly, almost hungeringly—I could feel it, though I did not see it—but I kept my eyes fixed over the sea, and a dead silence ensued between us. A dead silence, until it was broken by the living sound of tears; and I turned to see her dear head bent to her saddle-bow, and her slight figure shaken with her grief.

'Margaret, dear Margaret!' I exclaimed, forgetting everything but herself, 'it was nothing—indeed it was nothing; a few words spoken at random, of which no one in his senses would think twice, or be so presumptuous as to understand as the interpretation of your true feelings towards him.'

But in my anxiety and ardour I had blurted out far more than I intended.

'Be silent!' she cried, as she lifted an

indignant burning face to mine—'be silent, Captain Norton! if you do not wish to insult me, or make me hate myself and you.' And with that she dashed her hand impetuously across her eyes, and gathering up her reins, turned her horse's head away from the sea-beach and began to canter towards home. I followed her, of course; but we did not exchange another word, and she would not even condescend to meet the imploring glance which, as I took her from the saddle, I lifted towards her face, mutely entreating for forgiveness.

She behaved much the same as usual during the remainder of the evening; only that I saw she studiously avoided coming in contact with myself. What a fool I was to say as much as I did! I, who almost registered a vow this morning that nothing should tear the secret from my lips. And now I have betrayed her to herself. I see she shuns me; I know she fears me; I almost believe I have made her hate me. Well, I have brought it on myself, and I must bear it as best I may; it only proves how little we know when we think—as I did this morning—that the

world cannot hold a greater misfortune for us than the one we then endure.

Oh, Lionne, Lionne! what is to be the end of this?

August 12th.—I was scarcely surprised when Janie came to-day to tell me in a broken voice that her cousin had just informed her of her intention to leave Mushin-Bunda as soon as possible, and that she had already written to Mrs Grant to ask if she could receive her at Madras until her uncle's wishes with respect to her movements should be made known. I was not surprised, because I felt convinced that, after what had passed between us yesterday afternoon, her proud spirit would forbid her remaining under the same roof with me, if any alternative were open to her; at the same time I felt deeply hurt to think that my imprudence should be the means of driving her from the shelter of it. Janie, on the other hand, innocent as to the cause, had no reason to feel hurt, except by the want of confidence reposed in her; but she was wonderfully astonished, and disposed to resent my not being so as an additional grievance.

'Why, you don't seem in the least surprised to hear it, Robert!' she complained. 'Has Margaret said anything about it to you before?'

'The subject has never been broached between us; but Miss Anstruther has a right, of course, to follow her own inclinations, and we none to interfere with them.'

'No; but what can be the *reason?*'

'Did you not ask her, Janie?'

'Of course; but she only says that she does not feel so well here as she did at Madras.'

'I think that is quite sufficient to account for her desiring a change. Strength soon gives way in this country; and I don't think your cousin has been looking well or strong lately. What we know of her sleep-walking propensity is a proof of that.'

'Then I mustn't persuade her to stop with us, Robert?' continued Janie, pleadingly.

'By no means, dear. Let her follow the bent of her own wishes; it will be best for all of us.'

'But Uncle Henry will be so surprised; and I am afraid he will be angry—and—

and I had so hoped she was going to stay with me, Robert; and I feel so ill—and—and—so nervous, and I can't *bear* that Margaret should go away.' And here the poor girl was quite overcome by the prospect of her own weakness and her companion's departure, and burst into a flood of childish tears.

I felt very sorry for Janie. She has so thoroughly enjoyed the society of her cousin, and she is not in a condition to be vexed and thwarted with impunity. And then again I thought of Lionne travelling all the way back to Madras by herself, to accept a home from strangers, with nothing but her present unhappiness and her future uncertainty to bear her company; and I felt that neither of these should be the one to suffer, and that if the circumstances required a victim, it should be myself. I did not particularly wish to leave my regiment, nor my wife, nor any one else; but if it is impossible for us to continue on the same footing with one another, I felt that I should be the one to go. So I did not hesitate; but telling Janie to keep her tears until she should be sure they were

required, went in search of Margaret Anstruther.

She was neither in the drawing-room nor in the dining-room, but in a little antechamber which it pleases my wife to call her boudoir, but which is the dullest and most unfrequented apartment in the house. There I found her, lying on the sofa, shading her eyes with her hand, but making no attempt at work or reading.

'Margaret, may I speak to you?'

I could not, because I had offended her, go back to the more formal appellation of 'Miss Anstruther;' it seemed so much as though we had quarrelled.

'If it is of anything I should care to hear,' she said languidly.

'It is of something to which I much desire you should listen,' I replied. 'Janie has just been telling me that you purpose leaving us. Is that true?'

'It is,' she answered curtly, but not unkindly.

'I will not ask you for what reason,' I went on to say, 'because your wishes are your own, and shall be sacred; but if your decision is not irrevocable, think twice

before you inflict such a disappointment on poor Janie. You know how weak and ill she is at present.'

'Captain Norton, I must go.'

'*Must* you? If I leave the house myself—if I leave the cantonment, and do not return?'

'You are not in earnest?' she said, raising her eyes to mine, too weary to be called surprised.

'I am. I have long intended going to Haldabad on a shooting excursion, which may detain me for two or three months. Inadvertently almost I have delayed it, your visit and Janie's illness coming in the way; but now I am ready to start at twelve hours' notice, if need be—indeed, I am anxious to be gone.'

'And what will Janie say to that, Captain Norton?' she demanded in a lowered voice.

'At this moment I believe that my absence will affect Janie less than your departure would do. She is very much attached to you, and she feels the comfort of a woman's presence. Added to which, Margaret, I am in a great measure respon-

sible to your uncle for your proceedings, and I shall not feel easy if you leave my house for a stranger's without previously asking his consent. He will imagine I have proved unfaithful to my trust. Do you wish others to think as badly of me as I do of myself?'

As I uttered these words I dropped my voice almost to a whisper, but she heard them plainly.

'Oh, let me go! let me go!' she exclaimed wildly. 'It will be better, far better, for all of us. I cannot, indeed I cannot, remain here; the air of this place stifles me.'

'I have made you despise me,' I said despondently.

'No; oh no!' and her dark eyes were fixed upon me for a moment with an expression which I would have kept in them for ever; 'but—you *know*, Captain Norton, that it is best—that, in fact, we *must part*.'

'I do know it,' I replied; 'and therefore I am going. By this time to-morrow I hope to have made all necessary preparations, and to be ready for a start. Meanwhile you will stay here—I know

you will, because I ask you—to comfort and look after Janie until you receive your uncle's consent to go to Madras. And when it arrives, and you have left Mushin-Bunda, I will return to it.'

'And we shall never, never meet again!' she said, in a voice so broken as to be almost inarticulate.

I dared not answer her; had I spoken, I must have poured out all my heart.

'You have consented?' were my next words.

'Yes, since you think it best; only I am sorry to be the means of driving you from home.'

'If you are—though you have no need to be—will you give me one recompense, Margaret?'

She lifted her eyes inquiringly; speech seemed almost lost to her.

'Say you forgive me for what I told you yesterday. I have sorely reproached myself since.'

She stretched out her hand, and met mine in a grasp which, though firm, was cold as that of death.

'Then we part friends?'

It was again myself who spoke; she nodded her head in acquiescence, and I felt my prudence evaporating, and rushed from the apartment.

Written down, this interview seems nothing; but to those who feel as we do, the misery of years may be compressed into an hour; and that small room, for both of us, was worse than a torture-chamber.

I have scarcely seen her since, except at meals; but, as I anticipated, my wife was so delighted to learn that she should retain her cousin's company, that she thought next to nothing of my proposed shooting excursion, except to beg that I would take care of myself, and to wonder how I could like going after those 'horrid bears' and 'awful tigers.' Indeed, on the whole, I half suspect the little woman is rather glad to get rid of me, and pleased at the idea of having Margaret all to herself for a few weeks; for she has occasionally displayed the faintest touch of jealousy when I have broken up their *tête-à-tête* conferences. So I have sent them word down to the Fort to lay my 'dawk' for me, and

I shall start as soon as to-morrow's sun goes down.

I almost think we shall have a storm first, which would pleasantly clear the air; for the sky has been indigo-colour all to-day, and there is a strange heaviness over everything as I write.

I have been packing my portmanteau and cleaning my weapons, until I have fairly tired myself out; but were I to stop to think, I could never summon courage enough to go. The household is asleep, and has been for hours; and I am sadly in want of rest; for I can hardly keep my eyes open or guide my pen upon the paper —and yet I feel as though I should never sleep again.

Bah! I must be mad or dreaming. I am only starting on an ordinary shooting excursion, and I feel as though I were going to my grave.

This is folly—monomania; I shall be thankful when the hour comes for me to leave.

. . . . . .

Madras, October 20th.—It is more than two months since I transcribed a line in

this written record of my inmost thoughts —more than two months since that awful, horrible, and most unexpected catastrophe occurred, which I cannot now recall without a shudder, and which, for a time, seemed as if it must obliterate my reason or my life. But I am spared (though I cannot yet say, thank God that it is so); and were it not that my soul seems to die within me, and my energy to languish for want of some one or thing to which I may confide my sorrow, I should not have the courage even now to write the story down. But I must speak, even though it be but to a silent confidant, for my spirit fails for lack of sympathy; and therefore I draw out my old diary, and having read (shall I be ashamed to say with tears?) what I have written in these foregoing pages, proceed to bring the tale to a conclusion.

Let me try to collect my scattered thoughts, so apt to wander when I approach this miserable subject, and carry them back to the eventful moment when I last left off—to the night of the 12th of August.

I had sat up, packing my wardrobe and

writing my diary, until I had fairly tired myself out, and then, having put away my book and writing materials into the table-drawer, I locked it, and lighting a cigar, sat down to think; of what, and in what strain, I and these pages, to my misery, best know.

I had no intention of permitting myself to fall asleep; but it is my custom to smoke just before retiring to bed, and I should have anticipated a broken rest without the indulgence. At the same time my fatigue was greater than I thought, and after a little while drowsiness came over me, and before I knew that sleep was coming, I was in the land of dreams.

And such a land! Thank heaven, for those who are not destined in this world to know substantial happiness, that dreams remain to them.

I dreamt that I was with Margaret again on the sea-shore; not riding, but wandering hand-in-hand; not speaking coldly or with averted faces, but eyes to eyes, and heart to heart. I dreamt that I was watching the damask blush which mantled on her cheek, and listening to the low, mellow

sound of her rich voice, and that mingled with my own reply came the hoarse murmur of the ocean as it swelled and surged upon the shore.

I dreamt that we were one; one not in the earthly acceptation of the word, but in that fuller sense by which spirits are united to each other, never more to part; and that as we strolled upon the beach together we knew that neither death nor injury could sever us again. And amidst it all I was listening to the hoarse murmur of the waves, which rolled up to our very feet, and broke away, but to return with an energy louder and more imperative than before. I dreamt that as I stood thus, enfolding my new-found treasure in my arms, I started to find that the sky was overcast, and that the tide had surrounded us, and was behind as well as before, and threatening to overwhelm my darling. I dreamt that in my fear and solicitude I drew her backwards, trembling for her safety, and that as I whispered words of love and reassurance, I woke—to dream no more.

I woke, at the bidding of a loud and

terrified scream from the lips of my native servants, and springing to my feet, became first aware of a sensation of intense chillness, and next, as my remaining senses gradually returned to me, of a hoarse murmur somewhere near me, which recalled the memory of my dream.

The night was intensely dark; there seemed to be neither moon nor stars, and for one moment I stood, uncertain which way to move, and waiting to hear if the cry had only been my fancy, or would be repeated. Too soon it came again, this time louder, more terrified, more piercing than before; and its burden words of fearful import, too fearful to be at first believed. 'Master! master!' it said in Hindustani; 'master, the sea is on us!' And before I could scarcely realise the meaning of the words, the natives who slept in the verandah had rushed into my presence, and were immediately followed by a huge wave of water, which, with the hollow roar to which I had listened in my dreams, burst into the unprotected sitting-rooms, and washed over my feet.

'Master!' cried the natives, as they

clambered upon tables and chairs, 'the sea has burst its bounds; the sea is coming on us; the whole cantonment will be under water!'

'Close the doors and windows!' I exclaimed loudly; but no one stirred, and I attempted to set them the example of doing as I said, but it was too late. I perceived a dark volume of water stealing stealthily upon us from all sides, and even as I advanced towards the verandah, a huge wave dashed against me, washing me to the middle, knocking me backwards on the drawing-room table, and carrying away a chair as it retreated. At the same moment, a scream from the women's apartments told me that the sea had reached that quarter; and with no thought but for the safety of those dear to me, I dashed without ceremony into Miss Anstruther's room. I found her pale and trembling, but just awakened, sitting on the side of her bed with her bare feet in a river of sea water.

'What *is* the matter?' she gasped as I entered.

'The sea has overflowed the cantonment,' I replied hastily, as I quickly lifted

her in my arms; 'but trust to *me*, Lionne, and I will take you to a place of safety.'

She shuddered but made no resistance, until I had carried her to the dining-room, now half full of water, and was preparing to wade with her through the verandah, and place her on the roof of the house.

'But where is Janie?' she exclaimed, as she looked with horror on the advancing mass of water; 'oh, where is Janie?'

At her question I nearly dropped my burden; for the moment I had entirely forgotten my poor wife, whose screams were patent from the adjoining room.

'Go to her,' said Lionne, as she struggled from my embrace, and slid down into the cold waves, against the violence of which she could hardly support herself. 'Go at once! What were you thinking of? She will drown, if you do not take care.'

'I am doing as much as I can,' I answered hurriedly. 'Let me place you in safety first, and then I will return for her. I cannot carry two at once.'

'And you would leave her to the last?' she said indignantly; 'she, in whom two

lives are wrapt in one! Oh, Robert! I did not think it of you.'

'But, my beloved—' I commenced, in an agony at her delay.

'Go!' she said authoritatively; and I left her to her fate, and went.

I found my poor little wife wet through and screaming for help; and lifting her in my arms, I carried her, buffeting with the water as I went, through the dining and drawing-rooms to the outer verandah.

'Hold fast—take the greatest care of yourself,' I exclaimed in an agony of fear, as I battled past the white-clad figure which was clinging to the door-posts. 'I will return, Lionne, as soon as ever I can.'

'I am not afraid; God will take care of me,' was the calm reply; and I strode forwards into deeper and deeper water with each step. When I reached the verandah the struggle was severe, for there the waves were highest and strongest; but although much impeded by Janie's terrified clasp, I managed to wade with her to the foot of the ladder, and as soon as I had accomplished two or three steps of that,

the rest was easy. I toiled with my helpless burden up to the roof, despair lending strength to my limbs ; and as soon as I had reached it, I found myself in a goodly company of natives, who, with a few unfortunate exceptions, had managed to gain the top of the house as soon as the flood had surprised them. Having delivered Janie to the care of the ayah, I rushed down again to the assistance of Lionne, my heart throbbing as though it would burst with the fear that my efforts might be made too late. The water was now higher than ever in the verandah, and I began to be afraid that I should have to swim back again. I dashed on as vigorously and quickly as I could towards the door, to the lintels of which I had left her clinging. She was not there !

The dark water was swaying and surging through the deserted rooms ; the furniture was floating about in the most dire confusion ; trunks, portmanteaus, and other trivial articles knocked up against me at every turn before they drifted out to sea ; but my beloved I saw nowhere. In an agony I called upon her name, making the

walls resound with my voice, caring nothing who heard or listened to me.

'Lionne, Lionne! my dearest, my beloved! where are you? Speak to me.'

But no voice answered mine, no moan or groan reached my ears; and I waded into the chamber which had been my wife's.

Ah, what was that?—that helpless mass of white drapery clinging about delicately-moulded limbs, which swayed about in one corner, prevented by the wall — thank gracious heaven!—from floating out to sea with chairs and tables, but being knocked against that cruel wall with every motion of the waves, until no apparent life was left in it.

I took her senseless body in my arms, thankful even in that condition to have it there; and lifting the dear white face above the reach of the impetuous tide, laid my cheek against her own, although I believed that human warmth would never again visit it. It was no time for words or even thought. I pressed her to me as fondly as though the waves had been our bridal bed; and resenting the despair which urged me

to let the cruel water carry us both away together then and there, battled with it once more, and bore my treasure to the place of safety. But it was with feelings such as no words of mine can describe, that I laid her beauteous form, cold, dripping, on the bare bricks with which the roof is paved. I had already stripped myself of coat and waiscoat for Janie; and there was nothing on which to lay the senseless body of my darling but the wet cloths which the natives could contribute, and an old piece of carpet which was kept up there.

Meanwhile the hoarse flood continued to roll and murmur below, becoming deeper and deeper with each surge of the mass of waters; and cries of distress were heard from the surrounding houses; and the articles of furniture which floated past us began to be mingled with a vision of dead faces turned sightlessly towards the moon, now beginning to struggle out from behind the canopy of dark clouds which had hitherto concealed her. And still I bent above the face which had become so unutterably dear to me, and prayed heaven

to let her know me once more, if but for a moment's time.

Meanwhile poor Janie, exhausted by the fright she had undergone, and the grief she felt at the condition of her cousin, had fallen into a state which was half sleep and half syncope, and lay reclining with her head upon her ayah's lap.

And brother officers shouted to me from the roofs of neighbouring houses, asking if we were all safe—all well; and I answered that I hoped, I trusted so; and prayed heaven again to let her know me once more before she died.

And God granted me my prayer. Towards morning she awoke to consciousness. Just as the grey dawn commenced to break, and that dreadful flood, which continued for forty-eight hours to pervade the devoted cantonment, began to show symptoms of being at its height, she opened her dark eyes and gazed at me.

'Where am I?' she said, faintly.

'Here, dearest,' I replied, all reserve vanished in the face of death,—'here in my arms; in the arms of him who loves you better than his life.'

'It is not hard to die so,' she whispered; but as she spoke an expression of agony passed over her countenance.

'Are you in great pain, Lionne?'

'Yes,' she replied with effort.

'Where, dearest? tell me.'

'Everywhere—all over. I was knocked down so often.'

'Ah, my beloved! and I not there to help you.'

'You were doing your duty, Robert; and it will soon be over now—all will be over soon—all pain—*all*—'

'Not mine,' I murmured in an agony. 'Lionne, tell me—but once before we part—say that you love me!'

'My legacy,' she whispered, with a faint smile. '*Yes*, Robert; with all my heart—as my life, better than my life.'

'O God, spare her!' I cried aloud.

'O God, take me!' she said herself; 'take me from misery and disappointment to where there are no tears.'

'And how am I to live without you?' I exclaimed.

Her dark eyes met mine reproachfully.

'Janie—your child,' she gasped. 'I—I could have been—nothing.'

'You are all the world to me!' I exclaimed, passionately.

She lay quiet for a few moments, and then she opened her eyes wide, and fixed them upon mine.

'*Promise*,' she gasped—'Janie—to love—to love—to comfort—to—'

She fell back in my arms, and for a few minutes I watched with inexpressible pain the convulsive working of her beautiful features.

'Better—so much better—that I should go,' she whispered, after a long pause; and as she said the words she went.

It was the corpse of Margaret Anstruther, and of all my earthly happiness, that I laid down upon the sodden rags and piece of carpet.

I have no heart to write down the details of what followed. For two days that cruel flood pervaded Mushin-Bunda before it showed symptoms of subsiding; and before that time arrived, several hundred lives (chiefly natives) had been sacrificed. We

lost nearly all our furniture, though several pieces were left stranded in the compound when the waters retired; amongst others, the writing-table which held my diary.

But what avails it to speak of personal loss at such a time as this? My poor wife, from the combined effects of cold, fatigue, and terror, had a very serious illness, from which at one time I almost feared she might not recover; and on her return to health I brought her to Madras, from which place I write. She is now herself again; and I am in good health and tolerable spirits; and—and Margaret sleeps alone in a shady corner of the English burying-ground at Mushin-Bunda. No, not alone! God is my witness that my heart sleeps with her!

Note added ten years later.

I have been looking over my old diaries to-day, and burning most of them; but something within me seems to forbid that I should destroy these few pages which record the history of my brief acquaintanceship with Margaret Anstruther. They are the only remembrance I have left of her.

Ten years have waxed and waned since the dark night she died; what have they left me? A wife whom I love and in whom I trust; who, I may safely say, I would exchange for no woman living; who has brought me children, loving and docile as herself, and very dear to me; a happy peaceful home (no longer in the East); a moderate competence; and a name which I trust no man holds lightly.

And to these many blessings I add contentment, and wonder what more good on this earth a mortal could expect.

On this earth none; but whilst I ponder, I thank God that this earth is not the end of all things.

There was a time when I used to think and say that all my happiness lay buried in the grave of Lionne; but I have lived to learn and believe that at the Last Day it shall rise again, with her to bloom, ten thousand times renewed, in heaven!

THE END.

OLD CONTRAIRY.

IT was at the close of a sultry day in June, that the passenger vessel, 'Star of the North,' coasted the island of Martinique on her way to Barbadoes. The sea was calm as a summer lake, and an ominous stillness reigned in the surrounding atmosphere that made the words of a song, trolled out by a free, manly voice from the forecastle, distinctly heard in every part of the vessel,—

'Wherever you be, by land or sea,
Why, set your heart at rest;
For you may be sure, come kill or cure
Whatever is, is best!'

'Don't believe it,' grumbled an old seaman, who was seated on a coil of rope

mending a sail. 'I wish I'd had the ordering of my own life, any way. I'd have soon seen if it was best for me to be situated as I am at this here present!'

He was a fine old man, with rugged but well-cut features and muscular limbs. He had a clear blue eye, and silvery locks that showed he had been a handsome fellow in his day; but something or other had put him out of love with life, and his habitual mood was one of discontent. A passenger, who was pacing the quarterdeck, with a thoughtful countenance, turned at the old sailor's words and confronted the speaker.

'Don't you believe in a Providence that overrules all our actions, Williams?' he demanded abruptly.

'Oh yes, Mr Egerton, I believe in Providence fast enough; but when I see want and misery and injustice on every side of me, I cannot help thinking as our actions might be ruled a little straighter for us.'

'We are all apt to think the same, but that is because we cannot see the end of the beginning. Perhaps, too, you have never prayed that Providence might extend its fostering care over you?'

'You're mistaken, sir. No man ever prayed more than I used to do. I was a

reg'lar conwarted Christian at one time; and a morial example, but 'twarn't no manner of use. No one never heard nor answered my prayers, and so I left off a saying 'em, and I don't see as my troubles are a bit the wuss for it, neither. Everybody seems to get much of a muchness in this world, let 'em wear out their marrer bones or not.'

He re-applied himself to the patching of his sail, and the young man who had addressed him looked over the dark blue waters and sighed. He, too, had prayed for some weeks past that a certain blessing on which he had set his heart might be granted him, and his prayers had been returned upon his hands, as it were, unanswered. He was a very sad and disappointed man that evening, but his faith in Heaven was not one whit shaken by the trouble that had overtaken him. Even the clear, ringing laughter of Miss Herbert, as she sat on the poop and responded to the *badinage* and compliments of the group of gentlemen by which she was surrounded, although it made Egerton's brave heart quiver with pain, had not the power to cause it to despair.

'Williams,' he said, after a pause, 'you are altogether wrong. Prayer may not

be answered at once, nor in the manner we anticipate, but it is always heard, and what that song says is true,—"Whatever *is*, is best." It must be.'

But Williams still looked dubious.

'It's all very well for them, sir, as is rich and young, and got all their life before 'em, to think so. I dare say everything do seem best to them; but let 'em be sick and sorry and old, and obliged to work hard for their living, and I warrant they'd sing to a different sort of tune.'

'Are you sick, Williams?'

'Pretty middlin', sir. I've done a deal of hard work in my time, and I has the rhoomatics that bad in my hands sometimes as makes every stitch I put a trouble to me.'

'Are you sorry?'

'Well, I've had my share of that lot, Mr Egerton; but as I've told you already, 'twas nothin' to nobody what I suffered nor what I felt, and so I've larned to hold my tongue upon the matter.'

Richard Egerton looked at the old sailor's rugged face, down which time or trouble had made many a furrow, and his heart went out to this fellow-creature, who had sorrowed perhaps as much as he was doing himself, and had no outward alleviation for the world's injustice.

'Did you ever watch two people play a game of chess, Williams?' he asked, presently.

'Do you mean them little figures as they move about on a black-and-white board, same as we use for draughts, sir?'

'I do.'

'Oh yes! I've watched the passengers playing that game many a time.'

'Didn't it puzzle you at first to understand why the players should sometimes allow their men to be taken from them, or even place them in positions of danger where they could not possibly escape being captured?'

'Yes, sir!' cried old Williams, brightening up with intelligence. 'I remember there was one gentleman that crossed with us last year to Trinidad, and he used to boast that there was no one on board could beat him at that game. And no more there was, and his play was always to let the other sweep near half his men off the board afore he'd begin in arnest at all. Lord! I've stood and watched 'em when I was off duty, many and many a time, and been as near as possible a-crying out to him to take care; but he had got the game, sir, at his fingers' end, and always came off victor, whoever sat down with him.'

'Just so. That gentleman's plan must

have seemed inexplicable to anyone who was ignorant of the rules of chess, but those who knew them and watched them to the end, would have understood that he allowed his knights and pawns to be taken only, that he might preserve his queen and his castle, and win the game for them all. Do you follow me?'

'I think I can, sir, though I don't know where the dickens you're a leading me to.'

'Only to this point—that you must try and think in the same way of the dealings of Providence with men. We cannot tell why one of us is rich and the other poor; why one has blessings in this life and the other nothing but troubles. But God does. We only see the effect; He knows the cause. He is the player of the game, Williams, and does not allow one piece to be taken captive by the enemy, except with a view to final victory.'

'Well, sir, that's all very clever argumentation, but it don't convince *me*. It's sorry work listenin' to reason for comfort. He's swept away all my pieces, one arter another—there's no question about that—and left me alone in the world, and I can't see the mercy of it nor the justice either,' replied the old man in a discontented tone.

'But it is not only to the sick and the old and the poor that He deals out His judgments,' continued Egerton sadly. 'We all have our troubles, in whatever position we may be placed.'

At this moment the man up on the forecastle shouted again at the top of his voice, 'Whatever is, is best.'

'I wish that Ben's tongue was a little shorter,' exclaimed Williams hastily. 'He's always a bawlin' out them cheerful songs, as makes a feller feel twice as downhearted as he did afore.'

''Twould be all the same to you, "Old Contrairy," whatever he sung,' remarked another sailor in passing; 'for the song ain't written yet as would give *you* any satisfaction to listen to.'

'Well, I likes to hear sense, whatever it be,' shouted "Old Contrairy" after him. 'Look at that bank of clouds, rolling up from leeward. We shall have a squall before long, as sure as I sits here. However, I suppose that fool Ben would go on shoutin' "Whatever is, is best," if the "Star of the North" was split into fifty pieces, and he was just goin' under water with his mouth choke full of weed.'

'Heaven forbid!' exclaimed Egerton, as he turned away to seek his cabin. His

conversation with the old seaman had had the effect of increasing his depression, and he felt as if he could not trust himself to argue with him any longer. He would have much preferred on this sultry evening to take up his usual quarters on the poop, where the rest of the passengers were assembled ; but he had not the courage to go there. So the poor young fellow left the deck, and, entering his cabin threw himself down upon the sofa, which served him for a bedstead, and abandoned himself to the luxury of grief. He was altogether too young and too good-looking to feel so utterly bereft of hope. His bright brown curls covered a brow which was full of intellect, and bore upon its broad expanse the best sign of an honourable man—the impress of frankness and truth. His deep blue eyes, now so dull and troubled with disappointment, were generally bright and mirthful, and his athletic limbs, although but the growth of four-and-twenty years, gave promise of an unusual acquisition of manly strength and power.

And Richard Egerton had other heritages besides those of youth and beauty. He was the possessor, as the old seaman had intimated, of wealth and influence. He had been adopted in his infancy by a rich

relation, who had lately died, leaving him the whole of his fortune and his large estates in Barbadoes, on the condition that he assumed the name of Egerton, instead of that which had been his by birth. But what did all these advantages avail the poor lad to-day?—this day which had dawned so full of hope, and was now about to set upon the heaviest heart he had ever carried in his bosom. And pretty Amy Herbert, whose laughter still reached his ear at times, even where he lay, was the cause of all this trouble. They were not entirely new acquaintances. He had met her in England some months before, and had taken his passage to Barbadoes by the "Star of the North" only because he heard that she was going to travel in it to join her father, who was a civilian of some repute in Trinidad. He had admired her from the first moment of their acquaintance, and the weeks they had spent on board had ripened his admiration into love, and made him hope, as he had had every reason to do, that she was not indifferent to himself. He believed that his position as owner of considerable property in the West Indies would have ensured a favourable reception at the hands of her father, and had approached the subject of marriage with her,

if not with the certainty of being met halfway, at least with a modest hope that she could not think him presumptuous. And Amy Herbert had refused his offer—point-blank and without hesitation—unequivocally and decidedly refused it. It had fallen upon him as an unmitigated blow. How lovely she had looked that morning when he found her sitting in her basket-chair in a corner of the poop, shading her sweet, soft eyes from the glaring light with a rose-lined parasol. How confidently he had believed that he should see the long lashes lowered over those beautiful eyes, and the maiden flush of combined shyness and pleasure mount to that delicate cheek, as he poured forth his tale of love to her.

Others had watched the young couple sitting so close together on the poop that morning, and guessed what was going on. Others had seen Richard Egerton bending lower and lower over his pretty fellow-passenger, and gazing into her eyes as though he would read her very soul, as he whispered his hopes to her. The poor young fellow had been very modest over it, but he had made so sure that Amy Herbert's looks and actions could not have deceived him, that he had almost thanked her beforehand for the answer he expected

to receive. And she had listened to his proposal with well-feigned surprise, and rejected it with ill-advised haste. She had thought in her silly, girlish inexperience that it was more correct and womanly to appear horrified at the first idea of marriage, and she had been almost as despairing as himself as she saw Richard Egerton take her at her word and turn away without a second appeal, to hide his wounded pride below. She was deeply repenting her abrupt dismissal of him as she flirted on the poop with Captain Barrington, who was returning from leave to join his regiment in Barbadoes. But how was poor Egerton to know that, as he cast himself dejectedly upon his narrow berth and lay, face downwards, with his eyes pressed upon the pillow, lest the hot tears that scorched them should overflow and betray his weakness? The sound of her voice tortured him. He believed that she must be in earnest in showing a preference for Captain Barrington, and he was not yet strong enough to watch her fair face smiling on another man. So he delivered himself over to melancholy, and tried hard to believe that he would not have things other than they were.

'Whatever is, is best,' he kept on re-

peating inwardly. 'It will not do for me to preach a lesson to another man that I am unable to apply to myself. Besides, it is true. I know it to be so. My whole existence has proved it hitherto.'

Yet the smiling, sunlit pastures and cane fields, to which he was taking his way, and which had seemed so beautiful in prospect when he had hoped to secure fair Amy Herbert to reign over them as mistress, appeared to afford him but dull anticipation now.

'How shall I ever get through the work?' he thought, 'and my heavy heart and sluggish spirit will lay me open to the worst influences of the country. But I will not despair. My wants and my weakness are not unknown, and a way will be found for me even out of this "Slough of Despond."'

He was suddenly roused from his love-sick reverie by the sound of a low moaning, which seemed to pervade the surrounding atmosphere. Starting up on his couch, Egerton now perceived through the port-hole that the sky had become dark, and the noise of the captain of the vessel shouting his orders through a speaking-trumpet, and the sailors rushing about to execute them, made him aware that some-

thing was wrong. He was not the man to keep out of the way of danger. Brave as a lion and intrepid as an eagle, Richard Egerton, from a boy, had ever been the foremost in any emergency or danger. Now, as the warning sounds reached his ear, he rushed at once on deck. He remembered 'Old Contrairy's' prophecy of a squall, and his first thoughts were for the comfort and safety of Miss Herbert. But as he issued from the passengers' saloon a fearful sight awaited him. One of those sudden hurricanes, for which the West Indies are famous, and which will sometimes swamp the stoutest vessel in the course of a few seconds, had arisen, and the whole ship's company was in confusion. As Egerton sprang upon deck he could distinctly see what appeared to be a black wall of water advancing steadily to meet the unfortunate 'Star of the North.' With the exception of the noise consequent on attempting to furl the sails in time to receive the shock of the approaching storm, there was but little tumult upon deck, for everyone seemed paralysed with terror.

At the first alarm, Miss Herbert, with the remainder of the passengers from the poop, had attempted to go below, but, having reached the quarter-deck, was

crouching at the foot of the companion-ladder, too terrified by the violence of the tornado to proceed further. As for Egerton, he had to hold on fast to the bulwarks to prevent himself being washed overboard. His head was bare, and as he stood there, with the wind blowing his curls about in the wildest disorder, and his handsome face knit with anxiety and pain, Amy Herbert looked up and saw him, and registered a vow, in the midst of her alarm, that if they ever came safely out of that fearful storm she would humble her pride before him and confess that she had been in the wrong. The moaning of the tempest increased to a stunning roar, and then the huge wall of water broke upon the 'Star of the North' with a violence to which no thunder can bear comparison.

All hands were aghast, and the men were dashed about the deck hither and thither as the wind caught the vessel on her broadside. The awful noise of the hurricane rendered all communication by speech impossible, but the captain, by setting the example, stimulated his men to cut away the masts in order to right the ship, which had been thrown almost on her beam-ends.

In a moment Egerton perceived the

danger to which Amy Herbert would be exposed by the fall of the crashing timber. She was crouching in the most exposed part of the quarter-deck, her lovely eyes raised upwards, full of the wildest fear.

'There! there! Go there!' he exclaimed frantically, though his voice had no power to reach her, as he pointed to a more sheltered position under the companion-ladder. 'Get under there, for Heaven's sake!'

She saw the warning gesture of his hand, the agony depicted in his face, and understood the meaning of them, just as the huge mast bowed itself towards the sea. Egerton continued his efforts to make her see the necessity of moving, and she was just about to take advantage of the hint, when Captain Barrington crawled on all fours into the place himself. The little man was not too brave by nature, and fear had driven all thoughts of chivalry out of his head. For the moment the girl did not see who had forestalled her intention; she only perceived that she had lost her chance of safety, and waited the event in trembling anxiety. Down came the topmast with a crashing shock that threatened to sink the vessel. Yet Amy Herbert was sheltered from possible injury,

for, with a mighty effort, Richard Egerton had quitted his stronghold and flung his body upon the deck before her. For one moment he was conscious—happily conscious—that she was safe, and he had saved her; the next, he had fainted from a blow on the head and the pain of a large splinter of wood that had been broken from the falling mast and driven with violence into his arm. He did not hear the scream with which Amy Herbert viewed the accident, nor see the agonised face which bent above his prostrate form. He heard, and saw, and knew nothing, until he opened his eyes in his own cabin and perceived, with the dazed wonder of returning consciousness, that the old sailor, Williams, and the ship's doctor, Mr French, were bending over him.

. . . . . .

'You'll do now,' remarked the doctor as he held a cordial to his lips.

'Is she safe?' was all Richard Egerton said in reply, as he looked at his splintered arm. They thought he meant the 'Star of the North.'

'Oh yes, she's safe enough now, sir,' replied the old seaman; 'but we've had an awful time of it, and no mistake. We've lost our top-galliant mast, and our spars

and hen-coops have been washed overboard, and one of the boats got adrift in the squall, and the poor "Star" is stript of half her toggery.'

'But are any of the passengers injured?'

'No one but yourself, sir; but two of our best men went over with the mast, and Ralph White has broke his leg, and there'll be a tidy little bill for some one to pay when we gets into port again.'

'And that reminds me, Williams, that I must go and look after poor White,' said the doctor. 'I think I may leave my patient in your care now. All you have got to do is to see that he lies there till I come back again.'

'I'll look after the gentleman, doctor, never you fear,' replied the old seaman as Mr French left the cabin.

'It was an awful hurricane, Williams,' remarked Egerton, with a sigh of remembrance, as he turned uneasily upon his pillow.

'You may well say that, sir; and it's just a miracle as we're still afloat.'

'How little we thought, as we talked together on deck an hour or two ago, that death was so close at hand for some of us.'

'Ay, indeed, and with that smiling, burning, treacherous blue sky above us.

You have seen some of the dangers now, sir. I suppose you ain't going, in the face of this storm, to hold to Bill's song, that "Whatever is, is best."'

'Yes, I am, Williams,' replied the young man firmly.

'What! with our tight little ship knocked to pieces in this fashion, and your arm broken in two places?'

'Just so, Williams. Heaven sent both the storm and the accident. They *must* be for the best.'

'Well, I'm blowed!' exclaimed the old sailor in sheer amazement. The announcement seemed to have taken all the wind out of his sails, and he sat staring at the wounded man as if he had charge of a lunatic.

'How comes it that you are attending on me?' asked Egerton, as Williams handed him a glass of water.

'Well, sir, I seem to have took a fancy to your way of talking; so when they wanted some one here to help the doctor with your arm I offered to come, that's all.'

'It was very good of you. You told me this morning that you had had troubles, and prayer had never availed to get you out them. Do you mind telling me what those troubles are?'

'Not a bit, sir, if I sha'n't tire you; but it is a long story. I had a sweetheart when I was a young chap—most young chaps have, you know, sir — I daresay you've had one yourself before now—and I had a school-mate, too, by name—well! we'll call him Robert—and we both loved the girl dearly; but he got her, sir, and I had to go to the wall.'

'That was very unlucky for you.'

'Well, it was unfortunate, though he courted her above-board, and all was fair enough at the time. But the worst of it was that he turned out a regular bad 'un, and ill-treated his wife shamefully arter he'd married her. When I came home from sea, it used to make my blood reg'lar boil to hear poor Lottie tell how he'd beaten and kicked and starved her, for he'd taken to drink, you see, sir, and all his love had gone like a flash of lightning.'

'Was he a sailor too?'

'Yes, sir, and once, when I come off a long voyage to China and Australy, and round home by San Francisco, I heard that Lottie was a widder and in great distress, without hardly a bit of money. Well, I looked her up pretty sharp, as you may guess, and I found it was all true.'

'And then you married her.'

'No, I didn't sir. I've never been married. I don't deny I asked her, but she wouldn't have me, nor no one. She said it was too late, and she was dyin', which sure enough she was. But she had a child, sir—little Dickey—such a dear little chap, with blue eyes—just like her own—and pretty yeller curls; and when she died she left him on my hands, and lor', how fond I was of that little creetur! He took his poor mammy's place in my heart altogether.'

The old sailor stopped here, and drew his hand across his eyes.

'Did he die too, Williams?' inquired Egerton.

'Not as I knows of, sir. He may be dead or livin'. It's all the same to me now. *That* was the time I used to pray, Mr Egerton, night and day, that the little feller I was so proud on might grow up a good man and a good son to me and a comfort to my old age, and when I lost him I chucked up religion altogether.'

'How did you lose him?'

'In the cruelest of ways, sir. He had grow'd up beside me five years, and I had done everythink for him; and when he'd put his two little arms round my neck and kiss me, and look so like his poor mother

—who was the only sweetheart I ever had, Mr Egerton—I used to thank the Lord, with tears in my eyes, for *His* goodness to me. But it was all a delusion, sir.'

'Tell me the end of it.'

'The end of it was that, when my pretty Dickey was a smart little feller of about ten years old, I got him a place as ship-boy aboard the 'Lady Bird,' and we sailed for the Brazils together, as proud and 'appy as the days was long. And I was a teachin' the boy everythink, Mr Egerton, and he was gettin' that 'cute and handy—when, in an evil moment, that man whom we all thought dead and buried, turned up again somewhere down by Rio Janeiro, and claimed his boy of me.'

'What! the father?'

'Yes, sir. Of course he had the right to do it, and that's what the skipper tried to make me understand; but it broke my heart entirely. He thought he'd make money out of the lad's wages, and so he took him away from me, who was just like a father to him; and his screams, as we parted, have never left my ears since. And when I heard afterwards that the brute ill-treated Dickey, just as he'd done his poor mammy, I nearly went mad. The men calls me sulky, and "Old Contrairy," and

sich like names; but many's the time when they think me cross, I'm only dreaming over that time ag'in and cursin' them as brought me to sich a pitch. I shall never see my pretty Dickey ag'in, sir, till I meets 'im up above; and I shall owe Robert Hudson a grudge to the day of my death for robbin' me of him in that there cruel manner.'

'*Who* did you say?' cried Egerton, starting up in his berth.

'Please to lie down, sir? The doctor will be arter me if I lets you knock about in that manner. The name slipped out unawares, for 'taint of no use raking it up ag'in. It has nothin' to do with my story.'

'But, pray, tell it me again?'

'It was Robert Hudson, sir.'

'But Robert Hudson was the name of *my* father!'

'*Your* father, sir! But, beggin' your pardon, how can that be, when you're called Egerton?'

'I know I am; but I took the name from a relation who left me his money on condition that I did so. My real name is Richard Hudson, and I was brought up to the sea and adopted by my mother's cousin, Henry Egerton, because my father treated me so brutally. He was had up by the

police for thrashing me till I fainted, and then the magistrates gave me over to the guardianship of Mr Egerton ——; and, Williams, can it possibly be?'

'Sir, sir! don't keep me in suspense. What was the maiden name of your mother?'

'Charlotte Erskine, and she was born in Essex.'

'At Pinfold?'

'That is the place. My grandfather had the "Peartree Farm" there, and she is buried in Kensal Green Cemetery. Mr Egerton used often to take me to see her grave.'

'Oh, sir! this is very, very wonderful! Is it possible you can be my little Dickey?'

'It is quite true that I am the son of Robert and Charlotte Hudson, and that if I had not changed my name, we should have recognised each other before now. Do not think I have forgotten you, Williams? I cannot remember the face of my sailor friend; but I have never forgotten all his kindness to me. But surely I used to call you "Caleb" in those days, and have always thought of you by that name since.'

'True, enough, sir, that's me—Caleb Williams, and I can hear your sweet little

voice a-callin' Caleb from the top of the house to the bottom now; you was never long out of my arms, Mr Egerton. Day and night you was on this bosom, as you may say, and my heart's been as empty as a dried gourd since I lost sight of you. And so you're my own boy—leastways, what I used to call my own—and I've been a nussin' you again as I used to nurse you in the olden times. Oh, bless the Lord for all His mercies!' cried the old seaman, as he fairly broke down, and sobbed with his face in his hands.

. . . . . .

They talked for a long time over the past; Richard Egerton being scarcely less affected than old Williams, as, one by one, little incidents and reminiscences came to light to confirm their several identities, and make him see still more clearly how much he owed to the old man who sat beside him.

'And now, Caleb,' he said, when the evening shadows had deepened into dusk, 'this will be your last voyage. I cannot let you work any more. You know that I have riches, and you must share them.'

'Oh, sir, you are too good!'

'Don't call me "sir" again, please. Call me Richard, Caleb, or "Dickey," or any-

thing that pleases your fancy; but the man who acted as a father to me when I had worse than none, shall never address me as though I were his superior. What was it you prayed for me to become, Caleb, in those days when I used to sit on your knee with my little hands clasped about your neck?'

'A good man and a good son, my dear, dear boy,' quavered the old seaman.

'Well, I will try, at all events, to fulfil the last clause. My cousin Egerton, who was a rich tradesman, has left me all his property. I have land and houses in Barbadoes, and I intend to settle there; at least, for the next few years. You must come and live with me. You will find plenty of work on the estate to employ your time, if you wish to work; and if you wish to rest, you shall be idle. My father has been dead in reality for many years past, so that we shall be left alone and in peace this time to end our days together.'

'And there is no one else, my dear boy?' inquired Williams anxiously.

'How do you mean?'

'You are not married, nor likely to be?'

'I am not married, nor likely to be. There is no one else,' repeated Richard Egerton, with a bitter sigh.

'Don't sigh like that, sir.'

'Dickey, please, Caleb.'

'Dickey, then—my little Dickey, as I loved so hearty. To think I should have found you again arter all these years—grow'd to such a fine man, too—and in that awful storm! It beats everythink I ever heard of.'

'Whatever is, is best,' replied Egerton. 'You won't grumble again, will you, Caleb, because the answer to your prayer may be delayed a little?'

'Don't mention it, my boy. I feels ashamed even to remember it.'

'You see that even the hurricane has borne its good fruit as well as its evil. Without it we might never have been made known to each other.'

'It's bin a marciful interposition of Providence from beginning to end,' said old Williams, wiping his eyes. 'But I should like to see you a bit more cheerful, Dickey. There has been a sad look in your face the last four days, which I couldn't help noticin', and now that I knows you to be who you are, I sha'n't rest satisfied till you smiles in the old way again.'

Egerton was just about to answer him, when a gentle knock sounded on the cabin

door, which stood ajar in consequence of the heat.

'Who's that?' demanded the old sailor gruffly.

'It is only I,' responded a soft, trembling voice, which Egerton at once recognised as that of Amy Herbert. 'I came to inquire how Mr Egerton is getting on, and if I can do anything for him.'

'No, miss, thank ye, you can't do nothin'; he's a-goin' on very nicely, and I'm here,' responded Williams.

'May I speak to him for a minute?'

'Oh yes,' said Richard eagerly, raising himself to a sitting position.

The young lady pushed open the cabin door and stood on the threshold, blushing like a rose. She looked very beautiful, although her eyes were swollen with crying, and her dress and hair were in disorder.

'I felt I could not sleep until I had thanked you for what you did for me, Mr Egerton,' she uttered tearfully. 'You endangered your own life to save mine, who have done nothing to deserve such a sacrifice on your part.'

'Ay, that he did!' interrupted Williams.

'It is nothing—nothing,' said Egerton faintly, for the sight of her had upset all

his courage. 'You could not help it. It is not your fault if—if—'

'If—*what?*' demanded Amy Herbert.

He turned his eyes towards her, and a new hope ran through his veins like a reviving cordial. 'Caleb, my dear old friend,' he exclaimed tenderly, 'leave me for five minutes to myself.'

'What! all alone with the lady?' returned Caleb, regarding Miss Herbert as though she were a dangerous animal.

'Yes, for one moment only. I have something to say for her ear alone.

He had sprung off the berth in his excitement, and was about to quit the cabin.

'Don't go out, then, my dear boy, for mercy's sake,' said Williams, 'for you've lost a deal of blood, and are weaker than you think for. Will you promise me?'

'I do promise, if you will only go.'

The old man shambled out of the cabin as he spoke, and the two were left alone.

'I want so much to tell you,' said Egerton, speaking with some difficulty, 'what I had not the courage to say this morning, that I know it is not your fault. The blame rests entirely on me. It was my presumption—my madness, if you will—that led me on to speak to you as I did,

and I acquit you of all blame. I know you feel for my disappointment now—and I thought it would make you easier to hear this—that is all.'

'Oh, if I could only make you understand!' she sobbed.

'Pray don't distress yourself. I do understand it all. How can you help it if you find it impossible to love me?'

'But I do not—I mean, I can—that is to say, I did not mean—' stammered the girl, colouring scarlet at the admission she had been betrayed into making.

'Am I to understand that you did not mean what you said this morning?' exclaimed the young man as he grasped her hand. 'Amy, you have given me fresh life. Oh, do not take it back again! Say if you love me!'

Her maidenly bashfulness struggled for a moment with her probity, but the latter conquered.

'Yes, I do love you! It was my egregious vanity and love of conquest that made me trifle with your feelings this morning. I have been very miserable ever since. I have hoped you would speak to me again, and when I saw you risk your life for my sake, I wished that I might have died for you instead.'

'O Amy, Amy! Your words are opening heaven to me. Darling, is it possible that you will be my wife?'

'If you can forgive my heartless rejection of you, Richard. If you can believe that I am true in saying that I hated each word even as I uttered it. If you still think me worthy of being your life-companion, I will give you a very different answer now.'

'You have made me the very happiest man on earth,' he cried exultantly, as he folded her in his arms.

'Lor', sir!—I mean my boy, Dickey—you mus'n't be a-goin' on like this!' exclaimed old Caleb, appearing on the scene when least expected. 'The doctor's particular orders was that you were to keep quiet and not bounce about.'

'Caleb, my dear friend, I will be as quiet as your heart can wish now, for mine is at rest. Don't stare so. Come here, and sit down again, whilst I explain to this young lady all that you have been to me, and tell you all that I trust she will very soon be to me.'

'Oh, we're to have a missus arter all, then!' cried the old sailor meaningly. 'Why, I thought you told me just now, my boy, that you warn't a-goin' to be spliced!'

'Ah, Caleb, the storm has sent me a wife as it brought you a son. Had it not been for that awful hurricane, and the peril in which it placed this precious life, I am not quite sure if we should ever have been so happy as we are this evening. Never mind my wounded arm and the gash upon my cheek; Miss Herbert says she shall like it all the better for a scar. The wound in my heart is healed, Caleb, and life looks very fair for us all henceforward. And yet you could not believe "Old Contrairy,"' he added playfully, that 'Whatever is, is best.'

THE END.

'SENT TO HIS DEATH!'

I CAME down to breakfast one morning last autumn, and found a letter on the table from my old friend Bessie Maclean.

Bessie and I were girls at school together, and continued our intimacy after we left, until we married and went to different parts of the country. Marriage is a terrible breaker up of old ties; not only by reason of the separation which generally ensues, but because of the new duties it entails. We had both married the men of our hearts, however, and in comfortable circumstances; and so far all was well. But little by little our correspondence, which at first had been so voluminous and detailed, became scanty and irregular.

Bessie had half-a-dozen children to occupy her time and attention; and I—I had my dear husband to fill up the measure of my life, and felt myself a wicked and ungrateful woman if I even wished for more.

But—there is always a 'but' in the happiest worldly existence, is there not? —Dick and I had no children; and the disappointment had sometimes caused me to shed bitter tears. In secret though; I had never told my husband one-half I felt upon the subject.

Of course he twitted me with it sometimes in a playful manner, which showed that the fact did not sink very deep into his heart, whatever it did in mine. Yet I had thought occasionally that he looked more thoughtful than usual when children were in the room: and the idea made me thoughtful too. Especially I had noticed it when we paid our first visit to Bessie in her new house; for I must tell you that a few months before my story commences, Tom Maclean had bought a large farm in the vicinity of the town where the gaol stands, of which my husband is the governor. Of course, after so long a separation, Bessie and I were delighted to find we had become near neighbours again; and as

soon as ever the Macleans were settled, they invited us both over to Poplar Farm, to stand sponsors to the latest arrival—a little boy whom they called Richard, after my Dick, God bless him! Poplar Farm was ten or twelve miles from Chesterwick, however, so I had not seen my friends more than five or six times since the christening day; and the visits I had paid them had not quite realised the expectations I had formed of meeting Bessie again.

I suppose it was my vile envious nature, or perhaps the quiet life I have led with Dick has made me selfish; but it seemed to me as though all the time my old schoolfellow spent with me was devoted, not to our friendship, or reminiscences of our girlish days, but to talking about her children and telling me of their accomplishments or complaints, or consulting me as to their dresses or amusements. Of course I was pleased at first to be introduced to her fine brood of boys and girls; but I could hardly be expected to feel as much interest in them as their mother did, and I was sorely disappointed to find she had lost so much of hers in me. She did not seem to care to hear anything about my husband, or how we loved each other in

our happy, peaceful home; nor did she even talk much about Tom, with her affection for whom I could have sympathised better than with any other. But he appeared to be almost forgotten or overlooked in her maternal care for the little ones; and she was more anxious that Lily's new hat should become her, or Charley's medicine be swallowed without a fit of obstinacy, than that Mr Maclean should appreciate his dinner, or have his evening hours undisturbed for settling his accounts. I have observed the same thing—oh! scores of times—amongst my married female acquaintances; and the fact has done more to reconcile me to the want of a family than any other.

Not that I believe that the charge of a hundred children could ever make me forget my darling's wants—but there, this is not a love story, so I must try and keep my Dick's name out of it as much as possible.

I had received several letters from Bessie during the last month, which had rather surprised me, as she had grown very lazy at correspondence, as I have said before, and naturally, taking up her residence at Poplar Farm had not made her write oftener, excepting when she required the

benefit of my experience with regard to the advantages of her new home. Her two last letters, however, had been written in a very unaccountable strain; and if I had not known she was comfortably and happily situated, I should have imagined it was just the reverse.

'Another letter from Bessie!' I exclaimed, as I broke the seal. 'What on earth can she want now? I suppose she has found out somebody sells whiter flour than Watkins, or better tea than Amyott? I almost believe, Dick, she regrets having left Lincolnshire.'

'I don't know why she should,' replied Dick, as he commenced a raid upon the breakfast-table; 'for, according to Maclean's account, they lived in a perfect swamp there. But why can't the woman look after her own flour and tea? Why is she to worry you about everything in this fashion?'

'Oh! I suppose she thinks, as I have no children, I cannot possibly have anything to do,' I said, laughing; 'for I heard her remark, with regard to Mrs Anderson, who is in the same plight as myself, that it must be quite a charity to give her any employment!'

'Like her impudence,' growled Dick—(I

don't think Bessie is a favourite with my husband; perhaps I talked too much about her beforehand),—'I should let her know to the contrary if I were you, Dolly. I believe, with all her fuss and bustle, that you do twice her work in half the time.'

'Ah! I have only *one* baby to look after, you see, though he's a big one,' I said, as I gave his head a squeeze with my disengaged hand; 'but goodness me, Dick, this letter is worse than the last even. Bessie seems really in low spirits now. She says that Mr Maclean's business will take him away from home for a few nights next week, and she wants me to go over and spend them with her in—yes, she actually calls Poplar Farm—'this gloomy ramshackle old place.'

'It's old enough,' said Dick, 'and all the better for it; but it's not "ramshackle." Better walls and roof were never built than those of Poplar Farm. It stands as steady as the gaol.'

'But about my going to her, Dick—can you spare me?'

'Can I spare you!' repeated my husband in that tone of voice that, after ten years' marriage, has still the power to make my heart beat faster. 'Of course I can! I could spare you for good and all,

if someone would only be obliging enough to take you off my hands; but there's no such luck in store for me. Only mind the days don't stretch themselves into weeks, sweetheart!'

'Into weeks!' I replied, indignantly. 'Have I ever stayed weeks away from you yet, Dick? I'm not even sure that I shall go at all.'

'Yes! you'd better go, Dolly; Bessie Maclean is selfish and egotistical, and somewhat of a fool; but I daresay she's nervous at the idea of remaining in that isolated home by herself, particularly as it is all so strange to her. And you don't know what fear is, old woman!'

'I wish she could overhear the character you give her,' I answered, laughingly. But Dick was right. I am *not* a nervous woman, and if I had been, he would have cured me of it long before. Living in a gaol, and having, of my own free will, constant access to the prisoners, had effectually dispersed any ladylike unreasonable fears I may once have thought womanly and becoming, and made me ashamed of starting at shadows. So, having sent an affirmative answer to my friend's appeal, I set out for Poplar Farm, when the time came, with as much con-

fidence in my powers of protection as though I had been of the sterner sex.

Dick drove me over in the curricle.

It was a bright November morning: one of those days when the air is crisp and exhilarating without being in the least degree cold; a day on which one feels younger, and more hopeful and capable of good—on which one's sorrows seem too paltry for consideration, and one's happiness far more than one deserves. I experienced this sensation in the fullest sense, as I crept as close as I could to my husband's side, and smuggled one hand beneath his arm.

'Holloa!' cried Dick; 'why, what's this? Repenting of your promise already, eh? Oh! you spoony woman, I'm ashamed of you!'

I *was* repenting it, but I did not tell him so. It is good for people who love very much to part sometimes, if only to teach them how great a blessing they possess in each other's affection.

As we drove up the long-neglected drive of Poplar Farm, I could not help thinking that Bessie was right in considering it gloomy. The sun had disappeared again behind an autumn cloud. The trees had shed most of their leaves,

which lay in sodden heaps along the paths, and a chilly wind had commenced to blow. I drew my cloak closer against my shoulders, and told Dick what I thought.

'Nonsense, Dolly!' he replied. 'The place is well enough; and when Maclean has had time to put it in order, will be one of the prettiest farms in the county. I only wish I had the money to buy such another. But naturally it does not look its best when the trees are bare.'

'Stop!' I cried, suddenly; 'there's the baby. Let me get down and kiss him. That must be the new nurse carrying him, Dick. But what a lugubrious looking young person she is!'

My husband had good-naturedly drawn up by this time, and I had scrambled down to meet my little godson, who was about three months old. But as soon as I had pulled aside the veil that covered his face, I started with surprise.

'Oh! how he *has* gone off!' I exclaimed.

The baby, who had been so fat and dimpled and red-faced last time I saw him, was now drawn and white and thin. The change was apparent so that even Dick could see it from the box-seat.

'Whew!' he whistled; 'why, what's the matter with the little chap—is he ill?'

'Oh no! he's not ill. He is perfectly well. You don't think he looks ill, madam?' said the girl who was carrying him, anxiously.

'I don't think I ever saw a child so changed in my life,' I answered, in my blunt fashion. 'Are you the wet-nurse Mrs Maclean told me she had engaged for him?'

'Yes, madam,' she said, in a very low voice.

I raised my eyes, and examined her then for the first time thoroughly; and I could not help observing what a remarkable-looking girl she was. She had the very palest and clearest of complexions—so colourless that it looked like the finest white wax, and her skin was of the texture of satin. Her large, clear, grey eyes, which shone with a limpid light, like agates with water running over them, had a startled look, which might almost have been mistaken for fear, and her delicately cut mouth drooped in the most pathetic manner. To add to the mournfulness of her appearance, her hair was almost completely hidden beneath her cap, and her dress was the deepest widow's mourning. I made a few indifferent remarks about the child, kissed it, and jumped up to my seat again. The nurse was not the per-

son I felt to whom to speak on the subject of the baby's appearance. She made a deep reverence as the carriage moved off, and I saw she was a very superior sort of young woman; but of what account was that, where little Dick's health, and perhaps his life, was concerned?

'Bessie's a greater fool than I took her for,' I exclaimed, indignantly, as we drove on towards the house.

'What's in the wind now?' said Dick.

'Fancy, choosing a wet-nurse for a baby all crape and bombazine and tears. Why, that girl looks as if she cried night and day. I knew Bessie had been weak enough to be persuaded by the doctor to give up nursing baby herself, but she might have exercised a little discretion in the choice of a substitute. The child is half the size he was last month.'

'What a lot we know about babies!' said Dick, in his chaffing way.

'I should hope I know more than half the mothers I meet,' I continued, with some warmth. 'I should be ashamed to be as ignorant as Bessie herself, for instance, though she *has* had six children,' I added, with a little droop in my voice.

'My own Dolly!' said Dick, fondly; and when he says those words in that

voice, I don't care for anything else in all the wide, wide world. He wouldn't stay —even to dismount from his box, for we knew Mr Maclean had already left the house, and he thought our chatter would get on better without him, added to which he had duties demanding him at home. So I gave him one long, long kiss, and let him go; and as soon as he was out of sight, turned into the door of Poplar Farm.

Bessie was in the dining-room, where the dinner was already spread, surrounded by her batch of self-willed unruly children. As she came forward to meet me, I saw that she looked tired and worn out, and that her dress was untidy and neglected.

'It is so good of you to come, Dolly,' was her greeting, 'for I am so worried I don't know what I should have done without you.'

'I am very glad to be of use, Bessie; but what worries you—the baby?'

'Dear me! no. It is something quite different. Why should baby worry me? He has his wet-nurse, and she takes him completely off my hands.'

'He is so pulled down,' I said unhesitatingly, for I took an interest in my little godson. 'I met him just now in the drive,

and hardly recognised the child. Are you satisfied his nurse does him justice?'

'Oh, perfectly so. She is a most estimable young woman, so quiet and ladylike in her way of speaking. Did you notice her eyes? such a remarkable colour; and her hands are as white as yours or mine.'

'But the baby does not appear to be thriving. He can't inherit her eyes or her hands, you know, and if he could, I don't see that they would be much use to him. What's her name? Where did you find her?'

'She's a Mrs Graham; and she was recommended to me from the Lying-in Hospital at Chesterwick. I'm sorry you don't think baby looks well. Perhaps the change has pulled him down a little, though I really can't see it myself.'

I daresay she did not. Bessie is that sort of woman that never will see anything until it has actually occurred. If her children died, she would make as great a fuss over them—perhaps more—than mothers who have guarded theirs from their infancy upwards; yet she will let them eat improper food, and get damp feet, and remain out in the burning sun without any covering to their heads; and if you remonstrate with her, her invariable excuse is,

that they have always done so before and got no harm. As if the fact of a wrong being permitted should make it a right; or because we have fallen from the top of a house once without injury, we may cast ourselves thence headlong each day without impunity.

I really never did think, when Bessie and I were girls together, that she would turn out such a ninny.

'What *has* worried you then, since it is not the baby?' I demanded presently.

'Hush! I can't tell you before the children. It's an awful business, and I wouldn't have them hear of it for worlds. Will you lay your bonnet aside, and have dinner with us as you are? or I'm afraid it may get cold. Lily—Charley—Tommy, lay down these toys, and come to the table at once. Put Bessie up on her high chair; and somebody go and call Annie. Ah! Dolly, my dear, how well you have kept your figure! What would I not give to be as slim and neat as you are.'

And although, of course, I would not compare one advantage with the other, yet I must say that the pleasures of having a family would possess a great drawback to me, if I were compelled at the same time to become as rotund and untidy in appear-

ance as poor Bessie is at present. And I believe the chief thing Tom Maclean fell in love with was her pretty rounded little figure. Alas! alas!

But I am keeping the early dinner waiting. As soon as it was despatched, with the usual accompaniments of cutting up the children's meat, wiping their mouths, and preventing their throwing the tumblers at each other's heads, Mrs Maclean rose and offered to show me to my bedroom. It was next to her own, and communicated with it by a door.

'This dear old place!' I exclaimed as I entered it; 'you are making it very pretty, Bessie. Aren't you glad that you have come into such a handsome property, instead of having been stuck down in a modern villa, with the plaster on the walls only half-dry?'

But Bessie did not appear to appreciate my congratulations.

'Dolly,' she said, as she sunk down into a chair, 'I would change Poplar Farm for the poorest little villa that was ever built.'

'My dear girl, what do you mean?'

'*Mean!* That the house is haunted, Dolly—'

I confess it; I could not help it: I burst into the loudest and rudest laugh imaginable.

Poplar Farm haunted! What an absurdly unreasonable idea! Why, the last tenants had only just moved out in time to let the Macleans come in, and the house had been freshly papered and painted from basement to attic. There was not a nook nor a corner for a ghost to hide in.

I could not help laughing; and what is worse, I could not stop laughing, until my friend was offended.

'You may laugh as much as you like,' she said at last; 'but I have told you nothing but the truth. Do you mean to say that you consider such a thing impossible?'

'No! I won't go as far as that; but I think it is very uncommon, and very unlikely to occur to—to—to—'

Here I was obliged to halt, for the only words I could think of were, 'to anyone so material as yourself;' and I couldn't quite say that. For though I do not deny the possibility of apparitions, I believe that the person who is capable of perceiving them must be composed of more mind than matter, and there is nothing spiritual nor æsthetic about poor Bessie.

'What is the ghost like, and who has seen it?' I demanded, as soon as I could command my countenance.

'Several of the servants and myself,' replied Bessie; 'and Tom might have seen it, too, if he were not so lazy. But one night when the noises were close to our door, he refused to rouse himself even to listen to them, and told me to go— Well, dear, I really can't repeat what he said; but husbands do not always use the politest language when out of temper, you know!'

'Noises! Then the ghost has been heard as well as seen?'

'Oh yes! and such mournful noises, too. Such weeping and wailing, enough to break one's heart. The first time I saw it, Dolly, I thought I should have died of fright.'

'Tell me all about it.'

'I had been sitting up late one Saturday night mending the children's socks for Sunday, and Tom had been in bed for a good two hours. Everybody was in bed but myself, and I thought, as I carried my single candle up the dark staircase, how silent and ghastly everything appeared. As I turned into the corridor, I heard a gasping sound like a stifled sob. At first I could hardly believe my ears; but when it was repeated, my heart seemed to stand still. I was hesitating whether to go back or forward, and trembling in every limb,

when IT—this dreadful THING—crossed me. It sprung up, I don't know from where, in the darkness, and just looked at me once and rushed away. I nearly sunk to the ground, as you may well imagine. I had only just time to get inside my own door, when I tumbled right across the bed, and Tom had to get up and pick up the candlestick, and help undress me; and really, by the way he went on about it, you'd have thought it was all my fault.'

'What was IT like? that is the main thing, Bessie.'

'My dear, you don't suppose I looked at it more than I was absolutely obliged. I know IT was dressed all in white, with snow-white hair hanging over its face, and fearful staring eyes. It's a perfect wonder to me I stand alive here now.'

'And it has been seen since then?'

'Oh, several times, and we hear IT every night as regularly as possible about two o'clock in the morning. The cook has seen it—so has the housemaid; and not a servant amongst them would fetch a glass of water from downstairs after ten o'clock, if we were all dying for want of it.'

'A pleasant state of affairs,' I ejaculated; 'and will you take no steps to investigate the mystery, and dissolve the household fears?'

'What steps could I take?'

'Sit up for the apparition, and speak to it; and if it won't answer, take hold of it and see if it is flesh and blood or air.'

'My dear Dolly, I would rather die.'

'Well, I hope you'll wake me up when the sounds begin to-night,' I answered, 'for I am curious to hear them.'

But I didn't tell Bessie that I would be the one to 'bell the cat;' for, though I have little fear, I have no foolhardiness; and if her ghost turned out to be a real one, I had no wish to interfere with it.

In the evening, as much with a view of pointing out the baby's condition to Bessie as for any other reason, I asked her to accompany me to the nursery, and see him put to bed. I found that he slept in a room alone with his wet-nurse, who was engaged in bathing the little creature as we entered. Mrs Graham looked very pretty and delicate as she bent over the bath, attending to the child; but I observed that she never once smiled at nor played with him, as nurses usually do with infants during the process of washing. Little Dick was certainly very attenuated and languid, and even his mother seemed to observe it when pointed out to her. Mrs Graham listened to our conversation with

rather an anxious expression on her countenance, and I thought by drawing her out we might gain some clue to the baby's ill health.

'Is your own child strong and vigorous?' I asked her.

'My own child is dead, madam,' she replied.

'It was your first, I presume? You appear very young.'

'It was my first. I was twenty last birthday.'

She seemed unwilling to be more communicative, and I did not like to enter directly on the subject of her husband's death. Poor child! she might have loved him as I did Dick. So, as Bessie had sauntered into the general nursery and left us alone together, I ventured to sound her on another matter, which I thought might be having a secret effect upon her.

'Have you seen anything of this apparition the servants speak of, Mrs Graham?'

'No, madam,' she replied, quietly.

'It is very foolish of people to be frightened of they really don't know what; but no one seems to have been brave enough to try and find out the reason of the mysterious noises heard at night here. You have heard them, perhaps?'

'No, madam,' she said again, without further comment.

'Would it alarm you to see or hear it?' I had forced her now to say something in reply.

'I think not,' she answered, 'I think if spirits can come back from the dead, they must do so only in sympathy with those they have left behind; and, if that is possible, and I thought this one came for me, I should only be too thankful to have a glimpse of its face, or to hear the sound of its voice. I think those people who have so much fear of spirits can never have known what it is to lose any one they would lay down their lives to follow wherever it might lead them.'

She spoke in a low, mornful cadence that touched my heart. Poor girl! she was thinking of her husband and her own desolate condition. I felt for and sympathised with her, and before I left the nursery I took her thin hand and pressed it. She looked surprised, but I had only to say, 'I love my own husband as my life,' to see the tears run into her eyes, and to know she understood me. Still she was by no means a proper person to perform the part of a mother towards little Dick, and I resolved before I left Poplar Farm to try and persuade Bessie to change her.

The rest of the day passed rather monotonously. I worked at one of Dick's shirts, and wondered how I ever could have thought Bessie such a charming companion, whilst she alternatively indulged and scolded her very unpleasant young family. At last they were all despatched to bed, and as soon as decency would permit, I yawned and said I should like to follow their example. So we were all packed away by ten o'clock, my last act having been to pay a visit to Mrs Graham's room, where I had left her fast asleep with my little godson tucked in snugly on her arm. Bessie lay awake for some time talking of the celebrated ghost, but I was too sleepy to be a good listener, and am afraid I dropped off in the midst of her recital. When I waked again, it was by dint of feeling her shake my arm.

'Dolly! Dolly!' she was exclaiming, in a low, hurried voice. 'Listen! there is the sound, and close against the door.'

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